

BASOHLI PAINTING

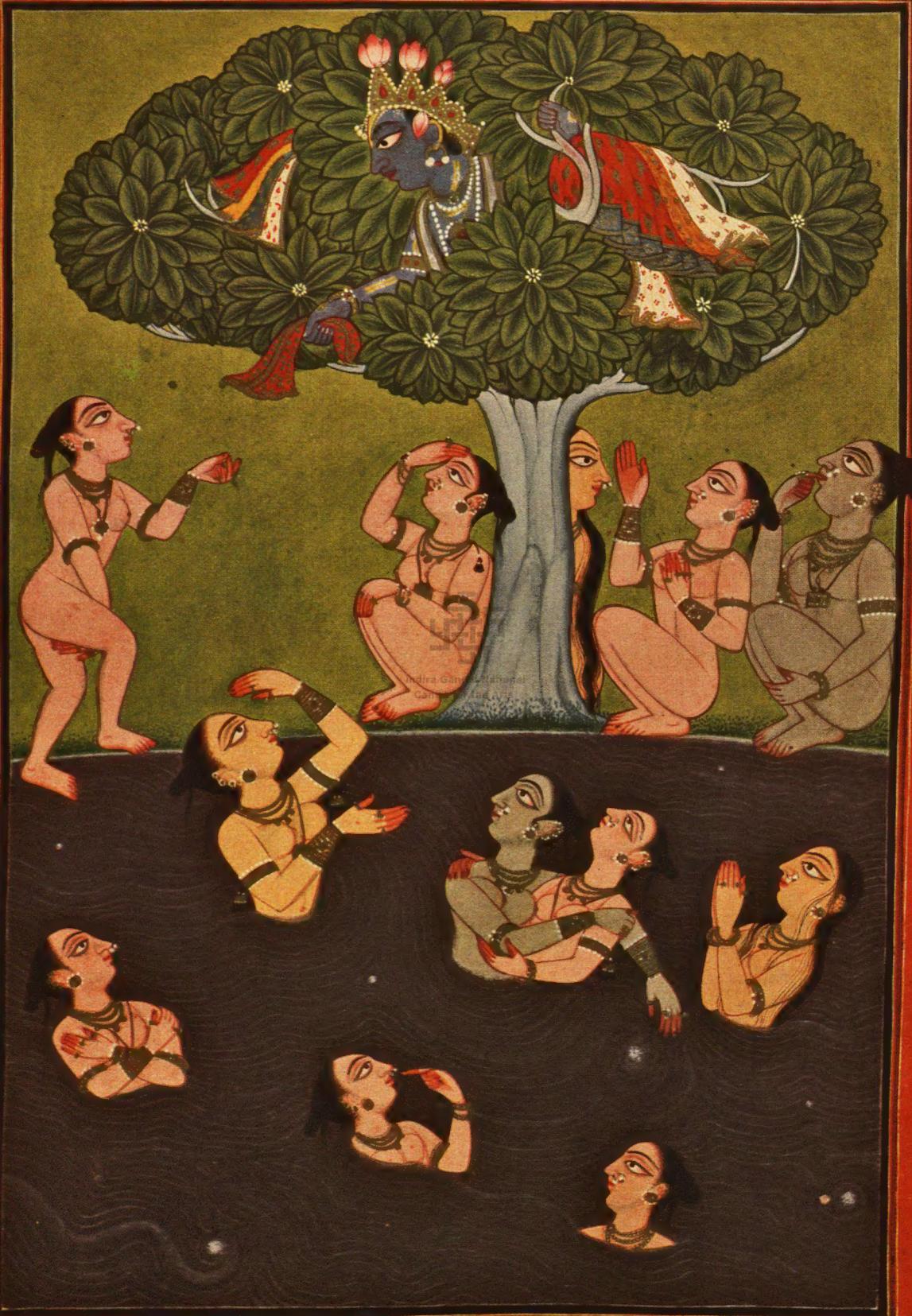
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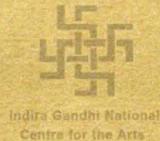
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BASOHLI was among the earliest centres of 'Pahari' painting which developed in the 17th and 18th centuries in the hill States of Jammu and Punjab. It combined the ancient tradition of folk art, associated with Hindu mythology, and Moghul technique. From this happy fusion arose a style of painting which is distinguished by its vibrant colours, simplicity, frankness and passionate approach to theme. This publication sums up the existing information on this school of painting, and presents thirty-eight of the finest examples of the school.



BASOHLI PAINTING

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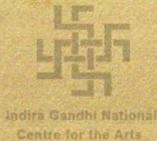
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An Idyll



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

A STYLE OF PAINTING characterized by vigorous use of primary colours and a peculiar facial formula prevailed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in the foot-hills of the Western Himalayas in the Jammu and Punjab States. The earliest paintings in this style originated in Basohli from where the style spread to the Hill States of Mankot, Nurpur, Kulu, Mandi, Suket, Bilaspur, Nalagarh, Chamba, Guler and Kangra.

The first mention of Basohli painting is in the annual report of the Archaeological Survey of India for the year 1918-19 published in 1921. Referring to the acquisitions of the Archaeological Section of the Central Museum, Lahore, the report states that "a series of old paintings of the Basohli School were purchased, and the Curator concludes that the Basohli School is possibly of pre-Moghul origin, and the so-called *Tibeti* pictures are nothing but late production of this School". A large number of paintings with deep red borders, painted in a simple and bold style in yellow, blue and red colours were finding their way to the picture market of Amritsar. The antique dealers of Amritsar were unaware of the centre of their origin, and ignorantly styled them as *Tibeti* pictures though they had no connection with Tibet. S. N. Gupta in 1921 describing 'Basohli Painting' writes: "Another type of paintings, both esoteric and secular, which clearly demonstrates a pre-Moghul existence,

may be found chiefly in Basohli in the Punjab. The peculiar interest attached to these paintings is that they relate very closely to the Nepalese school, and indirectly suggests its descent from the art of Ajanta. The Basohli paintings are very curiously called *Tibeti* by the curio dealers in the Punjab and elsewhere, but they have no direct connection with Tibetan or Nepalese paintings beyond the fact that the peculiar colour scheme in both the types is very much the same.”¹

Previous to this, in 1916, Coomaraswamy classified Pahari paintings into two groups, a northern series which he called the school of Kangra, and a southern series which he called ‘The Dogra school’ or Jammu school in which he included the paintings now ascribed to the Basohli school. Most of the paintings which he described as pertaining to the Jammu school really came from Basohli, Nurpur, Guler and even Kulu. He describes the school of Jammu in these words: “A group of paintings in a somewhat different style (from the Rajasthani paintings) emanating from the Punjab Himalayas, and especially from the Dogra Hill States, of which Jammu was the wealthiest and most powerful, dates mainly from the earlier part of the seventeenth century. Apart from their style, many of these paintings (which are generally known to Amritsar dealers as ‘*Tibeti*’ pictures) are recognizable by their inscriptions in Takri character.”²

Ajit Ghose visited Nurpur and Basohli in 1925, and from his on-the-spot researches came to the conclusion that the earliest of Basohli paintings go back to the seventeenth century, and that they had no connection with Jammu. Thus the assumption made in the first flush of enthusiasm that the paintings of the Basohli school were pre-Moghul was corrected. He also pointed out that Basohli is in Jammu and not in the Punjab. He further corrected the mistake made by Coomaraswamy (1910) in ascribing these paintings to the Jammu school. Discussing the source of Basohli paintings Ghose writes: “None of these pictures is described locally as coming from Jammu, nor are such paintings to be found in Jammu. The importance of Jammu as ‘the wealthiest and most powerful’ of the Hill States led Coomaraswamy to style the school the ‘Jammu school’. My personal investigation showed that a school of painting did exist in Jammu, but only in the nineteenth century. When Jammu became the most powerful of the Hill States and swallowed up the small principalities like Basohli, a large number of artists from Kangra migrated to Jammu. They found employment in the court, and the descendants of these artists received considerable patronage and flourished in the State till about half a century ago when they fell on evil times, and many had to return to Kangra. I have also ascertained that there is no tradition of any earlier school of Hindu painting having flourished in Jammu.”³

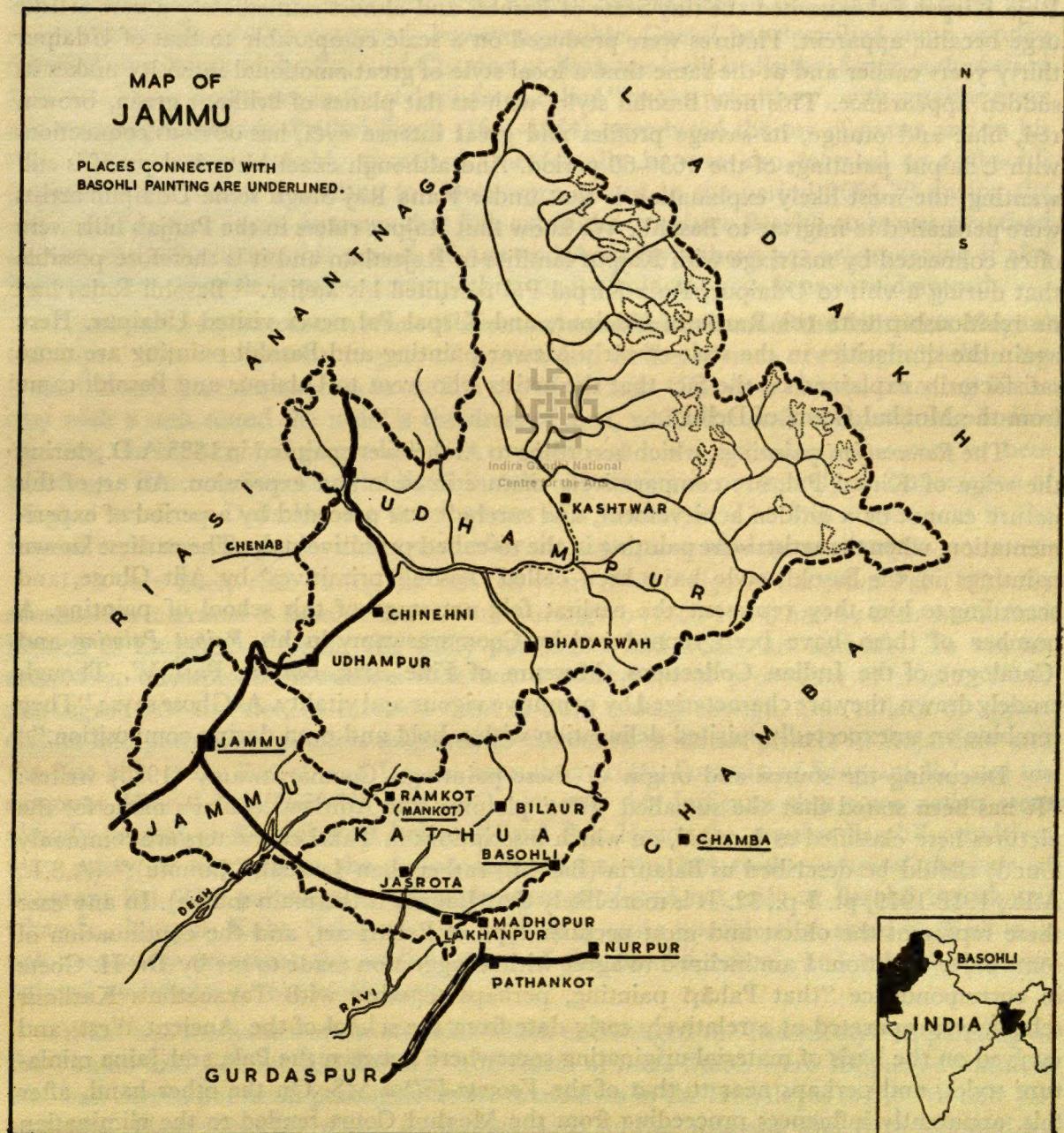
During his travels in the Punjab hills in 1930, J.C. French found similar type of paintings in Chamba, Mandi and Suket. He describes these paintings thus: “In this Chamba Museum there are a number of portraits of Rajas, which are not assigned to the Kangra Valley school but to local talent. The style of these pictures is similar to that of Basohli, and the writer would be inclined to suggest a local Chamba style allied to that of Basohli, were it not for the fact that he found similar work in Mandi and Suket, and all through the Kangra Valley itself.”⁴

In my travels in search of paintings in the Punjab Hills from 1950 to 1955, I saw a number of paintings in the so-called Basohli style in the collections of Raja Baldev Singh of Haripur-Guler, Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, and Mian Devi Chand of Nadaun, as well as in the collections of Wazir Kartar Singh Bassa-Waziran, Nurpur, Raja Raghbir Singh of Shangri in Kulu Valley, Raja Rajinder Singh of Arki, and Kanwar Brijmohan Singh of

INTRODUCTORY

Nalagarh. It seems that this style of painting was prevalent throughout the hills of Punjab-Jammu before the Kangra style matured. Both the styles of painting flourished side by side for some time. In fact, for a decade or so there was a competition between the artists of the two styles, particularly at Nurpur, Chamba, Mandi, Suket, Guler, Tira-Sujanpur, and Nadaun.

Has Basohli painting any connection with the Nepalese school of painting ? In the end of the 17th century, a mixed Rajput-Moghul style with brilliant red and yellow colour schemes was introduced in Nepal which also continued in the 18th century. Scrolls painted in this style, illustrating mythological tales, have been discovered. Recently Motichandra



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described a scroll depicting the story of Sudhanakumara which he has dated 1725 A.D. Resemblance with Basohli paintings in the colour scheme as well as in the clothes of male and female figures can be detected in these Nepalese paintings. However, apart from the distance and lack of geographical contiguity between the two States, there was no relationship between the Rajas of Basohli and the Gurkha rulers of Nepal. It appears to be more a case of parallel development, and resemblances between the two schools of painting are satisfactorily explained if a common source of artists is assumed.

Discussing the characteristics and origin of Basohli Painting, Archer (1957) writes : "Until the second half of the seventeenth century this stretch of country bordering the Western Himalayas seems to have had no kind of painting whatsoever. In 1678, however, Raja Kirpal Pal inherited the tiny State of Basohli and almost immediately a new artistic urge became apparent. Pictures were produced on a scale comparable to that of Udaipur thirty years earlier and at the same time a local style of great emotional intensity makes its sudden appearance. This new Basohli style, with its flat planes of brilliant green, brown, red, blue and orange, its savage profiles and great intense eyes, has obvious connections with Udaipur paintings of the 1650-60 period. And although exact historical proof is still wanting, the most likely explanation is that under Rana Raj Singh some Udaipur artists were persuaded to migrate to Basohli. We know that Rajput rulers in the Punjab hills were often connected by marriage with Rajput families in Rajasthan and it is therefore possible that during a visit to Udaipur, Raja Kirpal Pal recruited his atelier."⁵ Basohli Rajas had no relationship with the Ranas of Udaipur, and Kirpal Pal never visited Udaipur. Here again the similarities in the style of early Mewar painting and Basohli painting are more satisfactorily explained by the fact that the artists who went to Udaipur and Basohli came from the Moghul Court of Delhi.

The *Rasamañjari* paintings, which according to Archer were painted in 1685 A.D., during the reign of Kirpal Pal, are comparatively mature in style and expression. An art of this nature cannot be a sudden achievement, and surely it was preceded by a period of experimentation, when the artists were painting in the so-called primitive style. The earliest known paintings in the Basohli style have been called 'Basohli primitives' by Ajit Ghose, and according to him they represent the earliest folk art stage of this school of painting. A number of them have been reproduced by Coomaraswamy in his *Rajput Painting* and 'Catalogue of the Indian Collections, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Part V'. Though crudely drawn, they are characterized by primitive vigour and vitality. As Ghose says : "They combine an unexpectedly spirited delineation with a bold and even daring composition."

Discussing the source and origin of these paintings, Coomaraswamy (1926) writes : "It has been stated that the so-called *Tibeti* pictures (the Amritsar dealer's name for the pictures here classified as *Jamwāl*, on which inscriptions in Takri characters are commonly found) should be described as *Balauria* (Basohli) rather than *Jamuāli* (Jammu)." (A.S.I., A.R., 1918-1919, pt. I p., 32. It is more likely that Jammu is the main source). In any case these represent the oldest and most peculiar type of Pahari art, and the continuation of some older tradition. I am inclined to agree with a suggestion made to me by Dr. H. Goetz in correspondence "that *Pahāṛī* painting, perhaps together with Taranatha's Kashmir school, was separated at a relatively early date from the school of the Ancient West, and evolved on the basis of material originating somewhere between the Pala and Jaina miniature styles, and perhaps near to that of the *Vasanta-Vilāsa* MS. On the other hand, after this, apparently influences proceeding from the Moghul Court tended to the elimination

of old forms and the formation of a unified style in works, and later on dispensed with every trace of the past.”⁶

Whether the ancient Pahari painting which existed before the Basohli style had any link with the Gujarati painting of Western India is problematic. Transparent drapery and enlarged eyes are no doubt common features of Basohli paintings and illustrations of the *Chaura-Pañchāśikā* series, which are dated *circa* 1570. Besides, Lama Taranath, the Tibetan historian who wrote in 1608 about the Ancient Western Indian School having been founded by Shringadhara of Māru (Marwar), also says: “In Kashmir, too, there were in former times followers of the old Western School.” However, in the absence of more authentic evidence, the alleged link between Basohli painting and Gujarati painting is purely conjectural. The existence of a folk-art style with Basohli-like features in the Punjab-Jammu hills about the middle of 17th century is however possible. Goetz⁷ has described some wooden reliefs from a house of the Rajas of Chamba at Brahmor built by Prithvi Singh in the period 1650-60. These figures are in the style of the so-called ‘Basohli primitives’, with aquiline noses and receding foreheads. Prithvi Singh (1641-1664) introduced the use of paper and in his reign folk art was probably practised. Incidentally he was also married to a Basohli princess. These reliefs according to Goetz were carved in the period 1664-70 during the reign of Chhattar Singh. It seems that folk art in the primitive Basohli style was practised all over the hills during this period. If Age and Area Hypothesis has any meaning it also indicates that this style is quite ancient; otherwise it would not have been so widespread.

The Basohli style arose as a result of the marriage of the folk art of the hills with Moghul technique. The transparent drapery of women and clothes of men are Moghul, while the facial formula is local with roots in the folk art of the hills. The *jama* or side-fastening frock-coat with a sash round the waist is the dress of men, while the *choli*, a tight-fitting bodice covering the breasts, and *ghagra*-like skirt covered with a *sari* is the dress of women in these paintings. Thus we find that the Basohli style of painting is not merely an importation of Moghul art from Delhi but the development of a local style. The folk art element in the Basohli style remains predominant even after the absorption of Moghul elements.

It is very likely that during the last ten years of the reign of Sangram Pal (1635-73) some artists migrated to Basohli from Delhi. Aurangzeb (1658-1707) had by then established himself as Emperor of Delhi. His chilly puritanism had frozen art and life. To win his sympathy, unemployed musicians took out a mock funeral procession of music. When Aurangzeb saw the bier, he directed them to bury it deep enough. Due to lack of appreciation and patronage, painters migrated to the courts of minor princes in Rajasthan and the foot-hills of the Punjab and Jammu near about 1660. Portraits of Sangram Pal and his successor Hindal Pal (1673-78) are available, and this indicates that some artists were already present at Basohli even before Kirpal Pal. Hence the genuine Basohli primitives may safely be ascribed to the period 1661-73, i.e. the last twelve years of the rule of Sangram Pal. The paintings in this style were produced not only at Basohli but also at Chamba, Nurpur, Kulu, Nalagarh and Arki. It is quite possible that some of these may not necessarily represent the earliest stage of the Basohli school, and may have been painted by inferior artists much later.

What was the nature of the stimulus which encouraged the Basohli style of painting in the Punjab and Jammu Hill States? The rulers of these States were Rajput adventurers who had carved out small principalities for themselves in the Himalayas in the 7th and 8th centuries. Henceforth the plains were dominated by the Afghans who were followed by

the Moghuls. In the North which came under the full sway of the Muslim conquerors, Hindu culture found a sanctuary in the Western Himalayas. During the reign of Aurangzeb, proselytism to Islam and iconoclasm were rampant in the plains of North India. However, in the Hill States of the Punjab Himalayas, the Hindus could observe the rituals of their faith in comparative freedom. The seventeenth century in the Western Himalayas was a period of Vaishnava revivalism. Aurangzeb despised all arts including painting. Hence it is likely that during the early part of his reign some artists were attracted by the comparative security and freedom in which people lived in the small State of Basohli during the reign of Sangram Pal. It was this first migration of artists from Delhi to the Hill States in the Punjab and Jammu area which gave birth to the Basohli style of painting. The Vaishnava legends found visual expression in the paintings in the Basohli style, first in Basohli proper and later on at Nurpur, Chamba, Guler, Mandi, Suket and Kulu. In fact all the Hill States in the Punjab Himalayas and even the States of Mankot, Bandralta and Jammu came within the sway of this new style of painting which continued till about 1745. As the style spread, variations due to local conditions developed resulting in the growth of local idioms.

At about this time the authority of the Moghul Emperor at Delhi had weakened considerably due to the invasions of Nadir Shah (1739) and Ahmad Shah Abdali (1747). The Sikhs rose in the North and the Maharathas in the South. The result was that a second migration of artists, including both Hindus and Muslims, from the court of Mohammad Shah took place between *circa* 1740 and 1750, which led to the development of the Kangra style.

CHAPTER II
CENTRES OF BASOHLI PAINTING

THE BASOHLI STATE comprised a group of 74 villages which are now included in the Basohli tehsil of the Jasrota district in the territory of Jammu in Jammu and Kashmir State in the North-West of India. Though a small State hardly known beyond the boundaries of Jammu, Basohli has left a mark on the cultural horizon of India, and has contributed a peculiar tradition of its own to the Himalayan art.

The history of Basohli Rajas is lost in the mist of mythology. As in the case of some other Rajput kingdoms, Basohli Rajas claim descent from the Pāṇḍavas. The founder of the State was one Bhog Pal (765 A.D.), a son of the then Raja of Kulu, who subdued Rana Billo and founded the Balor State. He founded the capital also, known as Balor or Vallapura, on a plateau overlooking the Bhini river. The Basohli Rajas are called Balaurias, after their ancient capital. Balor is now a small decaying town, full of ruins, with a slovenly bazaar.

From the point of view of the history of painting, we can ignore the Basohli Rajas up to the close of the sixteenth century. The first Raja of Basohli who came in contact with the Moghul emperors was Krishan Pal, who appeared at the court of Akbar in 1590 A.D. with valuable presents. He is credited with having slain a tiger with a single stroke of a spear during a hunt arranged in honour of Jahangir in a forest near Nurpur.

Bhupat Pal, the grandson of Krishan Pal, was a contemporary of Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur. Jagat Singh was a favourite of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and on account of the influence which he had built up with the Moghul Emperors he was seeking to gain paramount power over the Hill States. As a result, there was acute rivalry between the Rajas of Nurpur and Basohli. By poisoning the ears of Jahangir against him, Jagat Singh managed to cast Bhupat Pal into prison, where he languished for 14 years. During this period Basohli was occupied by the Nurpur army. In 1627, Bhupat Pal managed to escape from prison, returned in disguise to Balor, and took up his abode in the Bagni forest. Bhupat Pal was a powerful man of great stature, and it is said that his daily consumption of food was sixteen seers of rice and one goat. While he was in the forest he was recognized by a shoe-maker who used to prepare shoes for him. The loyal shoe-maker informed the Raja's kinsmen, who all assembled under the leadership of Fateh Jung, defeated the Nurpur garrison and recovered the State in 1627. Bhupat Pal conquered Bhadu, Bhadrawah and Kashtwar in 1630. In 1635 he founded the present town of Basohli. In the same year he went to Delhi to pay his respects to Emperor Shah Jahan. There is a painting in Kangra style, acquired by Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu, from Pahda Kunj Lal, the royal physician of Basohli Rajas, in which Bhupat Pal is shown paying homage to Shah Jahan. During his stay at Delhi, Jagat Singh of Nurpur, his rival and enemy, managed to get Bhupat Pal assassinated. He was 62 years old at the time of his death. A portrait of Bhupat Pal in Basohli style exists but it may not be contemporary.

Bhupat Pal's son, Sangram Pal, was only seven years old when he was seated on the *gaddi* in 1635 A.D. When Sangram Pal was 12 years old, he was called to attend at the

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court of Shah Jahan, where he was received with honour. He became friendly with Dara

Sangram Pal Shikoh, son of Shah Jahan, and on account of his handsome appearance
(1635-1673) became a royal favourite. It is said that the queens, who heard of his beauty, expressed a desire to see him. Sangram Pal was, therefore, taken into the female apartments by Dara Shikoh. On reaching the entrance, a napkin was tied over his eyes, but the queens said that man's beauty lay in his eyes and begged to have the bandage removed. This was done. They were greatly delighted with his appearance and gave him rich presents. It is evident that Sangram Pal was in fairly intimate contact with the Moghul Court, and it is likely that he came to know Moghul artists during his stay in Delhi, and encouraged some of them to migrate to Basohli.

Sangram Pal was succeeded by his younger brother, Hindal Pal, who ruled for five years and died at the age of 45. A portrait of Hindal Pal is in the **Hindal Pal** Mankot collection now in the Punjab Museum, Patiala.
(1673-1678)

Kirpal Pal, son of Hindal Pal, was born in the year 1650 A.D. He married two Ranis. The first was the princess of Bandral and the second, his favourite, was from Mankot. He was a great scholar and lover of art, and was the main patron of the **Kirpal Pal** Basohli school of painting. Pahda Kunj Lal of Basohli possesses two **(1678-1693)** manuscripts of *Charaka* and *Sushruta* written by Shrikantha and Shiva-prasad, respectively, during his reign. The *Charaka* bears the following inscription :

Pañchaveda munichandrvatsare mādhave cha sitpakshage vidhau
 Shitadidhiti tithau vichitram pustakam hi chikirṣi nirmitam
 Shrimat Kripāla rajno'rthe mayā Shrikantha Sharmanā
 Chikirṣitamidam grantham chitritā bhimajāmhitam.⁸

(I, Shrikantha Sharma, keeping in view the interest of *Vaidyas*, compiled this wonderful book for Raja Shrimat Kripal, and completed it on Vaishakha Shukla 15, Samvat 1745 Vikrami. [1688. A.D.])

The *Sushruta* bears the following inscription :

Pañchābdhi munichandrānke vaikrame shubhavatsare
 Shrāvāṇasya sitepakṣhe dashamyām bhṛiguvaśare
 Kāshmir deshe puṇyābde prabhā Naurangashāhave
 Sutra-sthānam Sushrutasya chitritam tikayāyutam
 Shrimat Kripāla Pālasya prithvipālāya tuṣṭitam
 Mayā Shivaprasādena likhitam pustakam tvidam.⁹

(In compliance with the wishes of Raja Shrimat Kripal Pal, I, Shivaprasad, prepared the translation of *Sūtra-Sthāna* of *Sushruta* in Kashmir, a State in the empire of Badshah Aurangzeb, and completed it on Shravana Shukla 10, Friday, Samvat 1745 Vikrami.)

Kirpal Pal ruled for 15 years and died in 1693 at the age of 43 years.

Kirpal Pal had two sons, the elder being Dhiraj Pal, born in 1670 A.D. On the death of Kirpal Pal in 1693 Dhiraj Pal became the Raja of Basohli. Relations between the

Dhiraj Pal States of Chamba and Basohli were never happy. In 1725 A.D. war
(1693-1725) broke out between Dhiraj Pal and Raja Ugar Singh of Chamba; Dhiraj Pal was killed in battle and the *pargana* of Bhalai, the bone of contention between the two States, was reconquered by the Chamba Raja. Like his father, Dhiraj Pal was also a scholar and patron of painting.

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Dhiraj Pal's son, Medini Pal, also encouraged painters, and a good deal of painting in
Medini Pal late Basohli style was done under his patronage. In 1735 A.D. he
(1725-1736) invaded Chamba and defeated Ugar Singh and re-annexed the disputed
pargana of Bhalai.

Medini Pal was succeeded by Jit Pal, who reigned for 21 years and died in 1757. He
Jit Pal annexed Bhalai State to Basohli. During this period, Jammu had become
(1736-1757) a prominent State, and Maharaja Dhruv Dev of Jammu had achieved
considerable importance among the Rajas of Jammu hills.

Amrit Pal was born in 1749, and became Raja of Basohli in 1757. He married a
daughter of Maharaja Ranjit Dev of Jammu in 1759, and Basohli State to a large extent
Amrit Pal came under the control of the Jammu chief. On account of unsettled
(1757-1776) conditions in the plains of the Punjab, following the invasions of Ahmad
Shah Durrani and the rise of the Sikhs, the trade between India and

Kashmir was carried on through the outer hills. The trade route ran via Nahan, Bilaspur,
Haripur-Guler, Nurpur and Basohli to Jammu. The Basohli Rajas levied toll on all the
merchandise passing through their territory, and thus the State became quite prosperous
during the reign of Amrit Pal. Describing Amrit Pal as an ideal ruler, the author of the
Vamshāvali states : "He protected his subjects like his own children. He made Brahmins,
Kshatriyas, Rajputs and Vaishyas persevere in their sandhyā prayers and himself did the
same, as also in pūjā and dharma, the sacred duty. The four castes took their food in the
chauka. When the women came out of their homes and happened to meet a man, they at
once turned their back to him."¹⁰ Amrit Pal made considerable additions to the palace
at Basohli. Considering the prosperity which the place enjoyed, it appears very probable
that during the reign of Amrit Pal, Basohli remained a busy centre of painting. It appears
that the Kangra style had replaced the Basohli style even in Basohli itself during his reign.

Vijay Pal was born in 1763, and he became Raja of Basohli at the age of 13 in
Vijay Pal 1776. In 1782, Basohli was invaded by Raj Singh of Chamba with
(1776-1806) the aid of a Sikh army.

Mahendra Pal was a patron of the arts. Two portraits of Mahendra Pal in Kangra
style are known. One of these is in the family of Baroo Brahman of Basohli; the other
Mahendra Pal with Kunj Lal, dated 1803, shows a darbar in celebration of Basant
(1806-1813) Panchami. He married the daughter of Raja Ajeeb Singh of Jasrota.
In 1809, all the Hill States, including Basohli, came under the control
of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The hill Rajas were required to go frequently to Lahore,
where they attended the court of the Maharaja. During one of the trips in 1813, he
fell ill at Amritsar where he died.

Bhupendra Pal became Raja in 1813, when he was only seven years old. He
was also required, like his father, to attend the court of Maharaja
Bhupendra Pal Ranjit Singh at Lahore. He too died at Amritsar in 1834 after reigning
(1813-1834) for 21 years.

Kalyan Pal was the last Raja of Basohli. On account of misrule, during his minority,
Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave the Basohli State in *jagir* to Raja Hira Singh of Jammu in
Kalyan Pal 1836. It was during the minority of Kalyan Pal that the treasures of
(1845-1857) Basohli Raj, including paintings, came into the possession of Brahman
families of Basohli. In 1845 when the first Sikh war was fought, the Balauria Rajputs,
finding a favourable opportunity, expelled the Sikh garrison from Basohli and seated

Kalyan Pal, who was aged 11 years, on the *gaddi*. However, in 1846, Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu became the paramount chief of Jammu and Kashmir, and he assigned a pension to Kalyan Pal. In 1850, Kalyan Pal married a princess of Sirmur and later on a daughter of Chhatar Singh, exiled Raja of Mankot, who was living in Salangri. He died issueless in 1857, and thus the Basohli dynasty came to an end.

The present town of Basohli (latitude 32°-30', longitude 75°-51'), the cradle of Basohli painting, is situated on the right bank of river Ravi, in a fertile valley with a mean elevation of 2170' which stretches for about six miles to the south-west. It has a population of about 7000, and is fairly prosperous by hill standards. On a visit paid to Basohli in October, 1957, I found that it has even received the benefit of electricity, and a large number of houses are electrified. Dominating the flat-roofed mud-built beehive of houses of the farmers and shop-keepers of Basohli is the massive ruin of the palace of the Rajas. Excepting a solitary *chhatri*, which stands brooding over the ruin as a sole reminder of the grandeur of the palace, there is very little to show that it was once a magnificent building, and was regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the Hills of Jammu. The ruins of the crumbling walls of the palace have been pulverized into lime. Under the heap of ruins are a number of subterranean cave-like chambers, now the haunt of flying foxes. The battlements of the palace towards the riverside are comparatively intact, and now provide shelter to a troop of monkeys. Below the palace is a masonry tank with its water almost bluish green with algae. On one side of the tank is the temple of Nilkanth Mahadev, built by Raja Bhupat Pal.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Basohli owed much of its prosperity to the fact that it was on the famous trade route which passed through Nahan, Bilaspur, Guler and Nurpur to Jammu. It is said that 700 families of Kashmiri *pashmina* weavers, settled there, built up a prosperous trade. According to Kahn Singh Balauria, historian of Basohli, who was a resident of Basohli, the original site of the town was close to the right bank of the Ravi and its ruins were visible some years ago, but they have now been entirely washed away by the river. The Rajas of Chamba and Nurpur were constantly at war with the Rajas of Basohli, and the riverside capital town was strategically most insecure. It was to overcome this handicap that the present town of Basohli was founded by Bhupat Pal in 1635 A.D.

Bhupat Pal also founded the palace, and his successors Sangram Pal, Hindal Pal, Kirpal Pal, Dhiraj Pal, Medini Pal, and Amrit Pal made additions to it from time to time. Mahendra Pal added the Rang Mahal and Shish Mahal, which were decorated with mural paintings illustrating the *Nāyikā* and other erotic themes. Now these paintings have entirely disappeared. The importance of the palace lies in the fact that it figures in a number of Basohli paintings.

Vigne, the French traveller who visited Basohli between 1835-39, thus describes Basohli and its palace: "Bissuli contains a large and slovenly-looking bazaar, and the place would hardly, as far as I could judge, be worth the traveller's notice, were it not for the baronial appearance of the palace of the Old Rajas, which I thought the very finest building of the kind I had seen in the East. Its square turrets, open and embattled parapets, projecting windows, Chinese-roofed balconies, and moat-like tank in front presented a general appearance, which, without entering into specific detail, was sufficient to remind me of some of the most ancient red-brick structures of my own country. When viewed at the distance of a few miles from the path to Jammu, it rises in relief from the dark masses of the lower

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ranges, with a grandeur that I thought not inferior to that of Heidelberg; while with reference to more general effect the line of snowy peaks, which are seen peering over the mountains immediately around it are sufficient to render its relative position immensely superior.”¹¹

Ajit Ghose visited Basohli in October, 1928. Following Ghose, J. C. French, a Bengal civilian, who has done creditable work as a pioneer in the study of the hill paintings of Western Himalayas, paid a visit to Basohli in April, 1930. He reached Basohli from the Chamba road across Ravi. At Basohli he met a merchant who dealt in furs of wild animals and who had a collection of paintings. These were all examples of the early nineteenth century Kangra paintings, and he did not see any Basohli painting. He found the inside of the palace a horrible ruin.

We have already mentioned that apart from Basohli, there were other places also where styles akin to Basohli, with local variations, developed. These centres of painting developed under the patronage of the Rajas of Chamba, Kulu, Mandi, Arki, Nurpur, Mankot, Bandralta and Jammu.

CHAMBA

Chamba adjoins Basohli and, as described earlier, the rulers of Chamba and Basohli were constantly fighting. In Chamba also the primitive Basohli style gained currency very early. Portraits of Prithvi Singh (1641-1664), Chhatar Singh (1664-1690), Udai Singh (1690-1720), Ugar Singh (1720-1735) and Umed Singh (1748-1764) are in the collection of Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, and National Museum, New Delhi, and have been reproduced by Khandalavala in his *Pahāṛī Miniature Painting*. Even if the portrait of Prithvi Singh is not regarded as contemporary, there is no reason to doubt that the others were contemporary. These portraits are in the primitive style, which seems to have become established in Chamba very early. In fact no critical study of painting in Chamba has been made by any scholar, and any statement made in the present state of our knowledge would only be a surmise. The indication, however, is that the primitive style of painting had got established in Chamba very early, and probably as early as in Basohli itself.

KULU

A centre of painting in the ancient West Himalayan tradition, probably as old as Basohli, or perhaps of a little later period, is Kulu, where a distinctive style developed. In fact the Kulu face with its prominent chin, wide-open eyes, unsophisticated and innocent expression is easily recognizable. A large number of paintings with the characteristic Kulu face and lavish use of grey and terra-cotta red are seen in the collection in the Punjab Museum, Patiala. Apart from these, a set of 270 paintings illustrating anecdotes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are in the possession of Raja Raghbir Singh of Shangri in Kulu Valley, out of which three paintings have been reproduced in this book (Plates 16—18). Paintings of events from the various sections of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, viz. *Bālakāṇḍa*, *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, *Āranyakāṇḍa*, *Kishkindhākāṇḍa*, *Lankākāṇḍa*, *Sundarakāṇḍa*, and *Uttarakāṇḍa*, are in distinctly different styles, and appear to be the work of different artists. It seems that a group of artists was working at Sultanpur, the capital of Kulu, and they produced this remarkable album of *Rāmāyaṇa* paintings.



Dalliance of Radha and Krishna (Kulu)

When were these pictures painted ? According to Raja Raghbir Singh, the family tradition is that they were painted in 1670-1688 in the reign of Jagat Singh (1637-72) and Bidhi Singh (1673-88). The painters were a group of Kashmiri Brahmans, whose descendants still live in Paljhot village near Naggar, the summer capital of Jagat Singh. These *Rāmāyaṇa* paintings are in a primitive style akin to the *Rasamañjari* paintings, and resemblances between the two, particularly in architectural features, treatment of vegetation, and dress of figures are noticeable though the facial formula is distinctly Kulu. Hence it is very likely that they were painted sometime between 1688 and 1719 in the reign of Man Singh. The Rajas of Kulu and Basohli belong to the same clan, and a migration of artists from Basohli to Kulu is not altogether improbable. Jagat Singh was an ardent Vaishnava, and it was he who introduced Vaishnavism in Kulu Valley. He got the image of Raghunathji (Rama) from Ayodhya and installed it in a temple which he built at Sultanpur. During the reign of Jai Singh (1731-42) and Tedhi Singh (1742-67), painting in this style continued to be carried on at Kulu. A portrait of Tedhi Singh has been reproduced by Archer, which he ascribes to Nurpur. It is more likely that it was painted at Sultanpur for the Raja is referred to with such honorific titles as Shri Raja Tedhi Singh. It may be asked how this primitive style continued to flourish in Kulu Valley so late as this. Kulu is a remote valley in the middle Himalayas and has always remained more or less isolated. Fashions and styles which die out in other places often continue in remote and inaccessible areas. This explains why, while the Basohli style was being replaced in other States by the Kangra style during the period 1750-60, in Kulu the old style continued to be

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practised. In fact it was only in the later part of the reign of Pritam Singh (1767-1806) that the Kangra style reached Kulu.

MANDI

French has reproduced a painting of Raja Siddh Sen of Mandi (1686-1722) in his book *Himalayan Painting*. The painting is in primitive style akin to early Basohli and shows Siddh Sen well past middle age, and it can be dated *circa* 1690 A.D. It seems that before the Kangra artists came to Mandi during the reign of Ishwari Sen (1788-1826), there flourished in Mandi also a school of painting akin to Basohli. There is a *Rāmāyaṇa* painting in the National Museum, New Delhi, bearing an inscription that it was painted for a person, Kapur Giri by name, at Mandi. Some *Rāmāyaṇa* paintings in the mid-eighteenth century Basohli style have been reported from Suket.

ARKI (BAGHAL STATE)

Baghal State in the Simla Hills also had a school of painting in Basohli style. Arki, a picturesque town 22 miles north-west of Simla, was the capital. Rana Mehr Chand (born 1702 A.D., ruled 1727-53 A.D.) was a patron of artists, and there are a number of portraits of this Rana in Basohli style in the collection of his descendant, Raja Rajinder Singh.

NURPUR

During my travels in Kangra Valley in 1953-54, I discovered a collection of paintings with Mian Kartar Singh of Bassa Waziran near Nurpur. These paintings were studied by W. G. Archer and myself. The earlier ones among them were dated 1710-1760 by Archer, and were presumably painted during the reigns of Dayadhata (1710-35) and Prithvi Singh (1735-89). None of these bears any date, and Archer's dating is based on styles only. It is very likely that the paintings in primitive style which he has dated 1710 were actually painted in the period 1680-1690 during the reign of Mandhata (1661-1700). Portraits of Mandhata are in the collection of Lahore Museum as well as that of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras. Mandhata was a *mansabdar* of Aurangzeb, and it is very likely that on account of his contact with the Moghul Court, some artists came to him about 1680. According to Archer these paintings "differ from Basohli painting in the simple plainness of their composition, a greater delicacy in the treatment of physical types, and finally in their choice of milder and less feverish colours."¹² The prevailing colours are reddish browns, sage greens, dark greens, greys, and mauves. As in Basohli paintings, however, willows and cypresses are seen. The clouds are sometimes shown as small spirals on the horizon. Faces of women are usually sad and serious, and in many cases are decorated by strands of hair curling down the cheeks over the ears. The *Rasamanjari* paintings in the collection of Kasturbhai Lalbhai of Ahmedabad were also most likely painted at Nurpur, and there is no evidence to support Khandalavala's surmise that they were painted at Basohli. In fact there are a number of paintings of this type in Mian Kartar Singh's collection, which is the first authentic collection discovered from Nurpur. Moreover, no paintings in this style have been traced from Basohli or Jammu. Hence Khandalavala's insistence that these paintings are from Basohli is based on no factual evidence whatsoever. According to Archer, the Basohli style was finally eclipsed between 1760-1770. No doubt the Kangra style had matured at Guler by this time, but Nurpur artists, though they adopted the sinuous grace

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of the Guler female type, retained the bright red, blue and yellow colours of the Basohli style and created paintings of great beauty. This style, which I call 'Refined Basohli', is exemplified in the painting entitled, 'A damsel I saw supremely fair,' which can be dated 1790 A.D., the first year of the reign of Bir Singh (1789-1840). Apart from a liberal use of primary colours like red, blue and yellow, a high horizon, and the graceful willow trees which are Basohli features, the faces of Radha, Krishna, Balarama and the cowherd, are rounded, their eye-brows finely pencilled, and their eyes more life-like. (Plate 38).

MANKOT

Another centre of painting in Jammu Hills was Mankot, now known as Ramkot (Lat. 33°-38' and Long. 74°-6'), situated on the right bank of the Mandal stream in the Jasrota district of Jammu. Above the village is a fort which was the seat of *Mankotia* chiefs. Mankot derives its name from its founder, Raja Manak Dev, and as a State it was bounded on the north by Bandralta, on the east by Bhadu and Balor, on the south by the Karaidhar range separating it from Samba and Jasrota, and on the west by Bhoti. The Punjab Government purchased a set of paintings, 250 in number, for their museum from Tikka Inder Vijay Singh, a descendant of Mankot Rajas now settled at Salangri near Bhakra Dam. These paintings include two series, one illustrating anecdotes from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the other breeds of horses. Curiously enough we also find portraits of the Moghul emperors Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb in this collection. This gives an indication that these were painted during the reign of Aurangzeb in the period 1680-1690. In this collection are a number of portraits of Rajas, nobles, astrologers, *pandits*, *sadhus* and soldiers, which indicates that Mankot was also a busy centre of painting.

There are a number of portraits of Mahipat Dev (1650-80) whose daughter was married to Raja Kirpal Pal of Basohli. Possibly some artists shifted from Basohli to Mankot where also a minor school of painting developed. Mahipat Dev's grandson, Tredhi Singh (1710-30), was a contemporary of Maharaja Dhruv Dev of Jammu during the reign of Aurangzeb. Tredhi Singh's son Azmat Dev (1730-60), who was a contemporary of Ranjit Dev of Jammu, accompanied Bajraj Dev, Amrit Pal of Basohli and Ratan Dev of Jasrota, when a battle took place between them and Ghamand Chand Katoch over the possession of the fortress of Pathiar in Kangra. Azmat Dev's portrait also exists in the Mankot collection. Chhatar Singh's (1780-1809) daughter was married to Raja Kalyan Pal of Basohli. His minor son Purab Singh (1809-48) is shown riding a horse supported by two servants in a painting also in the primitive style, which indicates that the ancient style of painting continued till late at Mankot. It was Alakh Dev (1841-57), son of Purab Singh, who settled at Salangri, which was then included in Kutlehr State in Kangra district. Apart from Mankot other minor centres of painting in Jammu were Jasrota, Bandralta and Kashtwar.

JAMMU

While Coomaraswamy describes even Basohli painting under the school of Jammu, Ajit Ghose has gone to the other extreme and stated that there was no painting in Jammu prior to the reign of Gulab Singh (1846-57). Archer has established a Jammu style and has described a continuous series of paintings stretching from 1730 to 1785. In its early stages the Jammu painters concentrated on portraits of nobility, the nobles being depicted alone or in the company of their courtiers, relatives or servants. From 1730 to 1750 most of the paintings were in Basohli style and most probably painted at Basohli, Mankot, and Jammu. About

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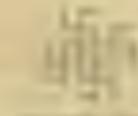
1748-50 we find a new style of painting in Jammu which Khandalavala has named 'Pre-Kangra'. There is a painting dated 1748 showing Balwant Singh with a party of musicians, painted by Nainsukh of Jasrota. While at Jammu Nainsukh painted a series showing the daily life of Balwant Singh which is now partly in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and partly in the Punjab Museum, Patiala. In these paintings Balwant Singh is shown at his prayers, on hunting expeditions, inspecting horses or being entertained by dancers and musicians. In one of these series, reproduced in Archer's *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills*, (No. 36) he is shown receiving a picture and Nainsukh himself is shown at the back of the throne standing with folded hands. About 1750, Nainsukh's style in Jammu stops with sudden abruptness, whereas from this year onwards the Guler school shows continuous development. This indicates that Nainsukh migrated to Guler where along with other artists from the plains a school developed under the patronage of Raja Govardhan Chand. Balwant Dev (Singh) was the youngest son of Maharaja Dhruv Dev of Jammu who was given a *jagir* of Rs. 40,000 by his father. Talented artists could not be expected to continue in the court of a minor *jagirdar* for long, and this explains the migration of Nainsukh and others to Haripur Guler where they could enjoy the patronage of a wealthier prince, with possibly a more refined taste. Apart from Nainsukh other artists also migrated to Guler where during the period 1750-60 the famous Kangra style developed.

During the last years of the reign of Jit Pal (1736-57), the Kangra style of painting had appeared even at Basohli. There is a portrait of Jit Pal in the Punjab Museum, Patiala, executed in Kangra *kalam*, which is possibly contemporary. Basohli style had definitely gone out of fashion even at Basohli during the reign of Amrit Pal (1757-76). This is borne out by the collection of paintings of Pahda Kunj Lal, a descendant of the royal physician of Basohli Rajas, now in Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu. In this collection, apart from a painting of Amrit Pal and his queen in Kangra style, there are a number of Kangra paintings of high quality including a portrait of Parkash Chand of Guler (1760-90) in his youth. It seems there was a free movement of artists between Guler and Basohli during this period. Goetz is also of the opinion that the original Basohli school broke up under Amrit Pal, a prince with very strong artistic interests, who was mainly responsible for the Moghul trend appearing in the last phase of the original Basohli style. This is also corroborated by the paintings in Kangra style on the door-wings brought by Raj Singh of Chamba after the sack of Basohli from the Basohli Palace in 1782, which are now in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.





Natni Balancing Pitches in Dance (Nadaun)



CHAPTER III

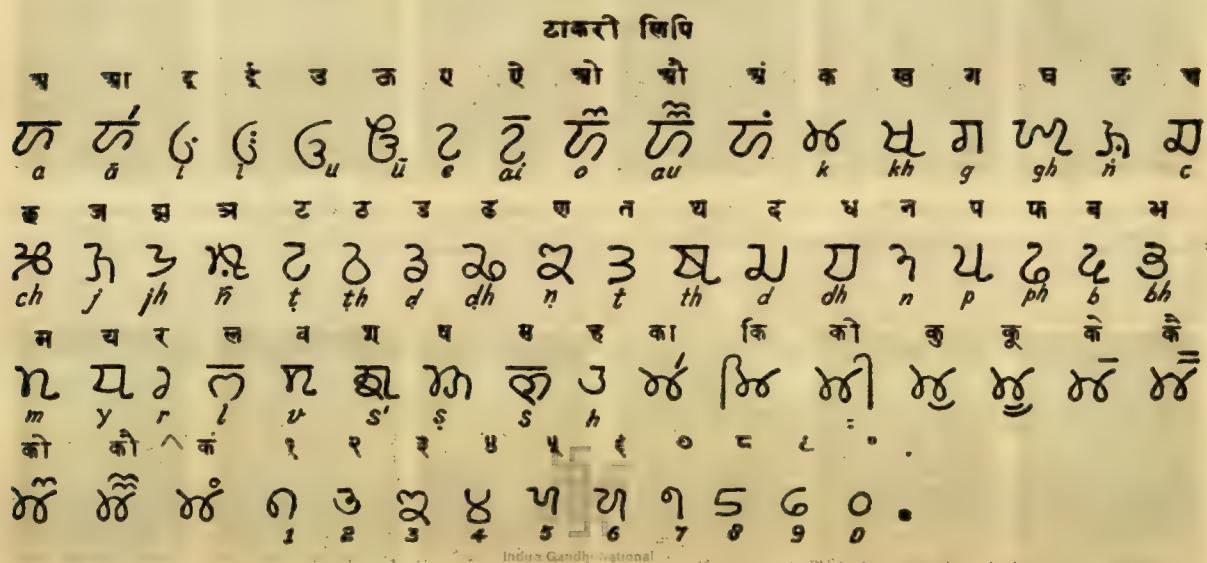
CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES OF BASOHLI PAINTINGS

BASOHLI PAINTINGS have an individuality of their own, and they are easily distinguished from Kangra and Rajasthani paintings. Though they lack the subtlety, delicacy and refinement of the Kangra style, they have vigour and the quality of simplicity. The painter states all the facts clearly in the boldest and broadest manner. The poetic themes of *Rasamañjari* and *Gita Govinda* are expressed with serene simplicity, the artist achieving the maximum of expression with the minimum of means. The approach is, however, passionate rather than sentimental. Some of the paintings are no doubt much too simple and tend to be bald and deficient in mystery. However, all schools of painting are to be judged by their best creations, and the best specimens of Basohli paintings possess a quality of frankness, vitality and vigour which is not seen elsewhere.

The borders of the paintings are deep red and rarely yellow. Paintings of the *Rasamañjari* and *Gita Govinda* series have Sanskrit verses inscribed on the back. The inscriptions in white on the top of red borders of paintings are invariably in Takri. Takri inscriptions are seen on paintings from the Punjab Hills also, and cannot, therefore, be taken as a peculiarity of the paintings from Basohli and Jammu only, as stated by Coomaraswamy. According to Grierson, all over the Western Pahari area the written character is in some form or other of the

CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES

Takri alphabet. In the Jammu territory the alphabet had been adopted for official purpose, and to fit it for this, it was altered and improved and was called Dogri. Another reformed variety of Takri is in use in Chamba, and is known as *Chameali*. The name of the Takri alphabet is derived from Takka, a powerful tribe which ruled the Western Himalayan areas, and whose capital was the famous Sakala, identified by Fleet with the modern Sialkot. The Takri alphabet has 54 letters, of which fourteen are in common with the Gurmukhi script of Punjabi, and only five in common with Hindi in Devanagari script. The alphabet and the numerals of Takri along with their Hindi and English equivalents are given below:



While the beauty of the Kangra painting lies mainly in its rhythmic line, the charm of Basohli painting is in its colour appeal. Vibrant colours like yellow and red which the Basohli artists used so liberally seem to penetrate the eye, and move us deeply. The colours are used symbolically. Yellow is the colour of spring and sunshine and mango blossoms. It is symbolic of the warmth of the Indian spring and the passion of lovers. It is lavishly used by Basohli artists to portray vast open spaces drenched in sunlight. Blue is the colour of Krishna, the cowherd god, as also of the dark rain clouds which fertilize the earth. Red is the colour of the god of Love, and admirably suits the passionate themes which form the subject-matter of Basohli paintings. The contrast of primary colours, particularly of blue and yellow and red and blue, which we see in Basohli paintings is delightful indeed. The colours glow like enamel and are used with great skill to establish the planes. The flat planes of yellow, red, blue, grey, green and brown seen in the paintings of the *Gita Govinda* series are truly remarkable, and illustrate the magic of colour and its emotional appeal. Another characteristic of these paintings is liberal use of gold and silver paints. Gold is used for embroidery and ornaments, and silver for embroidery as well as for painting of dress, windows and pillars of pavilions (Plates 26, 27). Pearls and necklaces are sometimes shown by raised white paint, as in some Rajasthani paintings. Decorative treatment of the landscape and high horizon are among the prominent characteristics of Basohli paintings.

As Ajit Ghose observes : "In these paintings, the landscape is treated as decoration. The drawing of the trees is distinctive. The forms of the foliage and the play of light through

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and wild eyes. Obviously the model before the artists was the nondescript breed, which is even now found in Jammu (Plates 6, 8, 10 and 14).

Basohli figures are liberally covered with ornaments, and even the demons are shown wearing necklaces. The crowns of gods and the necklaces, bracelets and ear-rings of women are decorated with beetle-wings cut into diamond-shaped pieces which greatly heighten the decorative effect of the paintings.

The dress of men and women in Basohli painting is also characteristic. Raja Kirpal Pal is shown wearing a *gherdar jama* of the Aurangzeb period, and a turban sloping back with a cross band. Similar dress is worn by the men in the Mankot painting depicting the birth of Krishna (Plate 7). The costume of women in *Rasamañjari* paintings is usually tight-fitting pyjamas (*suthan*) often striped, bodice (*choli*), and a flowing over-garment of silk or muslin (*pesvaj*) fastening in front. Sometimes women are shown wearing a flowing skirt (*ghagra*). The head and the *ghagra* is usually covered with a transparent *dopatta*. In *Gita Govinda* paintings the dress of women is a *ghagra*, a *choli*, and a *dopatta* covering the head and tucked in front of the *ghagra*.

Apart from the bold and vigorous use of colours, the Basohli artists evolved a facial formula of their own. Basohli faces are characterized by a receding forehead and high nose painted in unbroken continuation, and prominent lotus-like eyes. The almond-coloured *Gangi* (*Gangi badam-rangi*) is a favourite heroine in Dogra folk-songs, and it is the almond-coloured and almond-eyed Dogra women of Jammu who have provided the model for Basohli painters. Physical charm of woman is stressed by the enlargement of eyes which are shown blazing with passion. Ornaments and transparent drapery are skilfully painted to enhance feminine beauty. The shapely figures of women are elegantly displayed through the diaphanous *dopattas* which they wear. The glamorous ladies of Basohli paintings, adorned with pearl necklaces and ornaments, with their passion-filled eyes, hurrying to the tryst daring rain and storm are eternal symbols of the love of woman for man. The Basohli style with its frank and unrestrained delight in the feminine form loudly proclaims the joys of love. It is frankly and sincerely a sensuous art, which evolved in a puritanical society in which romance was taboo and love-making in the Western sense unknown.

THEMES OF PAINTING

The vital periods of any great art are usually preceded by cataclysms in culture, which violently shake the obsolete traditions and hollow conventions accumulated by society in the course of ages. One such event was the birth of Buddhism in India. The new creed agitated the soul of the people, and the great Buddhistic art blossomed like the flower-flood of a great Asian spring in India, China, Japan, Indo-China and Java. The great monuments of Ajanta, Angkor and Borobudur owe their existence to Buddhistic inspiration. The beautiful Wei art in China also followed the introduction of Buddhism. When Buddhism degenerated into fatal quietism and people were tired of the inert, bleak, and monotonous life of monasteries, renascent Hinduism came like a fresh breeze after sultry weather and inspired the great sculptures of Elephanta, Ellora, and Mammallapuram.

In the 11th century along with the rise of the vernaculars of North India, such as Bengali, Punjabi and the various dialects of Hindi, from the secondary Prakrits, we notice the rise of popular Vaishnavism in the cult of Rama and Gopala Krishna. It was however



Radha and Krishna in a Grove (Basohli)

in the 16th century that Krishna worship became popular in northern India. Vraja, the land of Krishna and Radha, became the home of a school of poets founded by Vallabhāchārya (born 1478) and his son Viñṭhulanātha. Vallabhāchārya preached that God was to be sought not in barren asceticism, nakedness, hunger and solitude but in the enjoyment of life. He popularized the worship of Gopala Krishna. The blind bard Sur Das (1483), the Mewar princess Mira Bai (1509), the Orchha poet Keshavadas (1581) and Bihari Lal, (1662) the author of *Sat Saiya*, seven hundred couplets many of which are in praise of Krishna, further developed the Krishna cult in their devotional poetry. Love was developed as a religious theme, and the new religion was a delightful amalgam of sensualism and mysticism. Discussing the theme of love in Vaishnavism and Christianity, Grierson writes : "The first reformers threw a mystic glamour over these amours of the god. The young Krishna represented to them the Supreme Deity, the Creator, from whom all Creation was but a sportive emanation, and full of love, passing the love of a father to his devotees. Radha on the other hand was the human soul, led by religion to offer not of her own, but her own, whole, self to God. That religion taught, just as our Christian doctors teach, the necessity of absolute entire self-surrender to the God which it adored, and, so too, imaged that devotion by human love. But the Christians chose filial love as the model of the soul's devotion, and paternal love as that of the Creator's love to his creatures. India took a different interpretation. The nations of Hindustan in some things are naked and unashamed. A different code of manners, a different standard of morals allow thoughts to dwell purely on things which to us are impure, and permit unwedded maidens to speak openly of things which are only whispered by their wedded sisters of the West. Hence the soul's devotion to the deity is pictured by Radha's self-abandonment to her beloved Krishna, and all the hot blood of oriental passion is encouraged to pour forth one mighty flood of praise and prayer to the Infinite Creator,

mentioned above: "In the Vikrami year corresponding to the moon, the mountains, the gems and sages (i.e. V.S. 1787 = A.D. 1730), Māṇakū who is eminent (through possessing) a multitude of virtues, who is an expert in Mālinī metre, and who is devoted to Vishnu, had the painting of *Gīta Govinda* produced decorated with beautiful writing."¹⁷ Māṇakū or Māṇak is a male name common in Jammu Punjab Hills, while the female name is Maṇako. Māṇakū is definitely described as 'chitrakartrā' or the painter, in the verse. Hence the assumption made by Chakravarti that Māṇakū was some Basohli princess is fanciful and wrong. The last three lines of the verse are more appropriately translated as follows: "Māṇakū, the painter, who is eminent through possessing a number of virtues, who is expert in Mālinī metre, who is a devotee of Vishnu, and is characterized by delicate brush, painted the *Gīta Govinda*."

The delightful theme of *Bāramāsā*, the twelve months of the year, attracted the attention of later artists, who painted in a refined style which approximates the Kangra style in spirit and delicacy. This style is illustrated in the *Bāramāsā* painting showing the rainy season (Plate 34). Whether it is *Rasamañjari*, *Gīta Govinda*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or *Bāramāsā*, the inspiration is provided by Krishna and his loves.

There are also a number of *Rāgamālā* paintings in Basohli style, illustrating the musical modes, *rāgas* and *rāginis*, particularly in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras. These *Rāgamālā* paintings are characterized by simplicity of composition and delicacy of colouring which mark them out from other Basohli paintings.

A theme popular with the artists of Nurpur was the ordeal of Narayan, the saint of Damthal. Many miracles are attributed to Narayan who performed penance at the present site of Damthal Ashram. It was, however, the ordeal of drinking poison which profoundly stirred the imagination of the hill people, so much so, that it formed the theme of many paintings including murals. On hearing the reputation of Narayan that he performed miracles, Jahangir, who was camping at Shahdara, sent for him. He asked him to take poison in his presence, and Narayan after remembering his Guru Bhagwan, swallowed six cups of poison in succession. The seventh cup was given to an elephant who died instantaneously. In the paintings Narayan is always shown along with Bhagwan, who is encouraging him in his hour of trial. Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur built the main temple in the memory of Narayan at Damthal in 1646 A.D. Damthal was formerly in Nurpur State, and also provided sanctuary to Raja Bir Singh when he was harassed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. All paintings showing the ordeal of Narayan are either from Nurpur or Guler, and are in the primitive Basohli style. Khandalavala described one such painting under the title 'Wine Tasters'. The painting described as 'Two Gossains' by Khandalavala (Fig. 27, *Pahari Painting*) is also of Narayan and Bhagwan, and is from Nurpur, and not from Kulu. Titling of paintings without adequate knowledge of their themes is extremely risky. Basil Gray similarly described Plate No. 9 in his *Rajput Painting* as "the Poet Vālmiki teaching *Rāmāyaṇa* to Kusha and Lava". Lava and Kusha were boys in their teens when they were in the hermitage of Vālmiki, while the two persons seated in front of the saint are grown-up men. In fact, it is a painting of the Durga series in which Vaishya and King Suratha are shown in the hermitage of R̥ishi Mārkan̥deya. Similarly, Plate LXXV-B of Sikh School entitled 'Kabir' in Coomaraswamy's *Rajput Painting* is actually of Guru Nānak with Mardānā playing the *rabab*, while Kabir and other saints are shown seated on a mat in front of him.

The Basohli artists also painted a number of portraits of the Hill Rajas. The fierce and bold style of these portraits particularly suits the subjects of these paintings for these Rajput

CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES

princelings were rugged warriors who were constantly at war with one another. Apart from the Rajas, their consorts, concubines, courtiers, servants and astrologers, learned men, soldiers, *sadhus*, mendicants, farmers and herdsmen are also depicted. Hence as a visual record of a social order which has passed away, these paintings are very valuable. They tell us what types of clothes were worn by the princes, nobles and their wives as well as the herdsmen and the farmers. They tell us what type of architecture prevailed, and in what types of houses the people lived in those times. Above all they tell us of the ideals which inspired the Hindus, the rulers, the common people, the poets as well as the painters. In the love of *gopis* for Krishna, they interpreted the yearning of the human soul for God. For after all the sole purpose of human existence is the union of the soul with the Supreme Being, and when this occurs, the individual achieves the bliss of Nirvāṇa. It is the very reason for existence, and the soul yearns for this mystic union, as the *gopis* yearned for Krishna, or as a loving wife yearns for her husband, or the moth for the flame. In fact the Basohli artists have represented in a tangible and expressive form the entire material and spiritual texture of the life of the Hindus in the Western Himalayas in the 17th and early 18th centuries in their paintings.



PLATE 1

PORTRAIT OF RAJA KIRPAL PAL Basohli, circa 1690-93 A.D. Size 9.9 in. x 8.6 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

The Basohli school of painting developed under the patronage of Raja Kirpal Pal. A number of portraits of Kirpal Pal are available in various collections. The portrait reproduced here is from the collection of Mankot family.

According to Kahn Singh, the historian of Basohli, Kirpal Pal was a scholar who patronized learning. Pahda Kunj Lal possesses a manuscript of *Sushruta* written during his reign at the close of which is the following verse in his praise :

श्रीकृपाल इतिनाम धारयन् ।
धर्मशास्त्रमनिशं विचारयन् ॥
विष्णुमेव मनसापिधारयन् ।
जीविताद्युद्ध रिषुविदारयन् ॥

Shrī Kripāla itināma dhārayan
Dharma-shāstra manishaṁ vichārayan
Vishnumeva manasāpidhārayan
Jivitādyuddha ripurvidārayan.¹⁸

“Raja Shri Kirpal, as his name indicates, is kind hearted. He is a scholar of Dharma-shāstras, and is a devotee of Vishnu. He is a great warrior too, and does not spare his enemies in the battle-field.”

In this portrait, Kirpal Pal appears to be about forty years of age, and hence it can be dated 1690-93 A.D. It is a contemporary portrait of high quality, which he seems to have presented to his father-in-law, Raja of Mankot.

Kirpal Pal is attended by two women servants, exquisitely dressed. This is another evidence of his aesthetic sensibility and good taste. Note the resemblance of the faces of the women and the manner of their wearing ornaments with *gopis* shown in Plate 14, ‘The Magic of Krishna’s Flute’, and Plates 26 and 28 of the *Rasamañjari* series. Their striped trousers (*suthan*) and transparent overgarments (*pesvaj*) resemble those of the love-lorn princess and her attendant in the painting from N. C. Mehta’s collection named as ‘An Idyll’ which was very likely painted during the reign of Kirpal Pal. The background in both the paintings is mustard-yellow.



PLATE 4

THE BIRTH OF EVIL

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Basohli, circa 1730-40 A.D.

Size 12.5 in. × 8.4 in., Provincial Museum, Lucknow

In discourse XX of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Maitreya thus explains the birth of the Universe and creation of various kinds of living beings to Vidura. "The Highest Being, in the form of water, gradually gathered and stored within himself a glowing energy. Then, in his boundless strength, he determined to produce again the universe. The Supreme Spirit presiding over Time and Matter evolved Mahat-tattva, the principle of cosmic intelligence. He visualized the form of the universe in its five elements of ether, air, fire, water, and earth. Calm lay over the ocean, fathomless and subtle. Vishnu, having entered the water, gently stirred it. As the waves rippled, there was formed among them a tiny cleft. This cleft was space or ether, invisible, intangible, the most subtle of the five elements. Space resounded, and from the sound arose the second element, air, in the form of a wind. The third element, fire, arose from the friction of wind and water. All the elements combined with divine energy to produce a shining egg which lay on the waters of the cosmic ocean for a thousand years. Then Vishnu entered it and rested on the serpent Sheṣa. He sank into a mysterious slumber, and in his sleep he imagined the creation of the animate and the inanimate. From his navel grows the mystic lotus with petals of pure gold, stainless, radiant as a thousand suns. And together with this lotus he puts forth the God-Creator of the Universe, Brahmā, who is seated in the centre of the golden lotus, which expands and is radiant with the glowing energy of creation. From its pericarp then issue the hosts of the created world."

Now Brahmā started his creative activity. At the very outset he evolved five kinds of ignorance, viz. *tamas* (ignorance about one's own self), *moha* (identification of self with the body), *mahāmoha* (the craving for enjoyment), *tāmisra* (anger) and *andhatāmisra* (looking upon death as end of human personality). Then he created hills and trees, birds and beasts, night and day, demons, gods and men. Later he took on the aspect of *rajas* (passion). He was consumed by hunger, and there sprang up from this *rajas* a host of evil spirits, some of which turned on him in attack. Brahmā became full of anger, and from his anger sprang ghosts and fiends (*bhūtas* and *pishāchas*) with blood-shot eyes and terrifying faces. In this painting are shown the malevolent spirits created by Brahmā who are responsible for all the evil in the world. The Basohli painter has depicted the fury and anger of the demons with a power which compares favourably with the best work of the Chinese and the Japanese master painters.



PLATE 5

THE CHURNING OF THE OCEAN OF MILK

Basohli, *circa* 1730 A.D.Size 12.2 in. \times 8.4 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

The asuras, the forces of evil, were getting powerful, and the gods came to Vishnu for help. Vishnu, the preserver of Cosmos, devised the scheme of churning the Ocean of Milk with the object of obtaining *amṛta*, which would sustain the gods, and make them immortal. Thus began the churning of the Ocean of Milk. The churning stick was the holy mountain Mandāra, the abode of gods, which was carried to the ocean, and placed on the back of Kūrma, the king of tortoises, an incarnation of Vishnu himself. Sheṣa Nāga formed the churning rope, the demons holding its hood, and the gods its tail. Into the radiant waters of the Ocean of Milk were thrown various kinds of medicinal herbs, and the churning began. After the gods and demons had laboured at their task for a thousand years, a curious assortment of objects and symbols began to arise. The first product was the all-destroying world poison, which out of compassion Shiva drank. On seeing her husband in danger, Umā pressed his throat, and the poison remained there for ever. Then arose the divine cow Surabhi, the fountain of milk, first sustenance of the human race. Then came Vāruṇi, the deity of wine carrying golden pitchers full of liquor, and her eyes rolling with intoxication. Next, from the whirlpool of the deep, came the celestial Pārijāta tree, symbol of all lovely flowers and precious fruits with which the earth is blessed. Then emerged the moon and a bow which were seized by Shiva. Then appeared Lakshmi, also called Shri, seated on a full blown lotus, holding lotuses in her hands. On her birth the heavenly choristers sang her praises, and the four heavenly elephants of the quarters bathed her with the pure water of the Ganga and other sacred streams. The Ocean of Milk presented her with a wreath of unfading flowers; and the goddess decorated herself with beautiful ornaments. Thus bathed, attired and adorned, radiant with beauty, Lakshmi cast herself upon the chest of Vishnu, while the demons, enraptured with her beauty, desired to possess her. Lakshmi was followed by the eight-headed steed, and the gleaming gem Kaustubha, which decorates the god's breast. Then came Dhanvantari, the divine chemist bearing in his hand a golden cup filled with *amṛta*, the elixir of immortality. Next arose Airāvata, the white elephant, which Indra took for himself. The titans fought against the gods for the possession of the *amṛta*, and the lovely goddess, Lakshmi. Vishnu assumed the form of a beautiful woman (Mohini) and so charmed the titans that they presented the *amṛta* to her. Vishnu immediately gave it to the gods, who thus became immortal.

In this powerful painting Vishnu is shown seated on the mountain Mandāra. He is also shown holding the tail of the serpent, and in front of him is the four-headed Brahmā and behind him is Shiva. The demons are horned creatures with awful faces and clawed feet. The products of churning are shown at the top. The vibrant yellow background is symbolic of the fierce struggle between the gods and the titans.



PLATE 6

THE ADORATION OF VISHNU

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Basohli, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 12.1 in. x 8.4 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

Explaining the circumstances which led to the reincarnation of Vishnu as Krishna avatāra, Shri Shukadeva, the sage, says to King Parikshit: "Ugrasena, the king of Mathura, had a beautiful and faithful wife named Pavanarekhā. One day while she was taking the air in a forest, she was raped by a demon named Drumālika, who was Kālanemi, the enemy of Vishnu. The child born to Pavanarekhā was Kāmsa. As soon as he grew up Kāmsa deposed his father, and became king of Mathura. He began to oppress all worshippers of Vishnu, and on account of his wickedness and cruelty even the patient mother Earth groaned. The Earth assumed the form of a cow, and went complaining to the celestial region. She thus addressed Indra: 'The demons have begun to work exceeding wickedness, and my body is so burdened with inequities that I can no longer sustain them. O mighty one, save me, otherwise I shall sink to the bottom of the abyss.' Indra having heard this, went to Brahmā, taking all the gods with him. Brahmā conducted them all to Shiva. Shiva taking mother Earth and all the gods proceeded to the shores of the Ocean of Milk, the abode of Vishnu.

"Brahmā bowing before Vishnu, composed his mind in meditation, and thus gave praise to the Highest Being: 'Adoration to the Infinite One, who is simultaneously the manifestation, the preservation, and the dissolution of the universe! Thou art subtle beyond all discovery of the senses. Thou art prodigious in thine essence. Thou art of everything the root. Thou bringest forth spirit—that primal substance from which arose and arise speech and the senses. O Thou Highest of All, have mercy! Here, seeking in Thee her refuge, comes the Earth. Thou end without end, beginning without beginning, final refuge of all beings, the goddess begs of Thee redemption from her burden. Demons, earth-born, are shattering her rocky sinews. Indra, myself, and all the gods, beseech of Thee Thy counsel: tell us, O Lord and Essence of our Immortality, tell us what we must do.'

"Vishnu plucked two hairs from his head, a light and a dark one, and then addressed Himself to the assemblage on the shore: 'These two hairs of my head shall descend to the Earth and take away her burden. All the gods, too, shall go down to her, each in a portion of his essence, and rescue the Earth by conquest of the demons. There is a certain princess, Devakī, the wife of Vasudeva, and she is like unto a goddess among men. This dark hair of mine is to become the eighth fruit of her womb. I shall descend into her and be born of her, and shall kill again the demon Kālanemi, in his present incarnation, Kāmsa.' Vishnu vanished, and the gods, falling to their knees, paid homage to the Invisible. Then all descended from the summit of Mount Meru."¹⁹

In this painting Vishnu and Lakshmi are seated on a lotus and in front is the deputation of gods led by Mother Earth in the form of a white cow followed by Brahmā, Shiva and others. The willows with their graceful branches provide a delightful contrast with the stylized trees with circular crowns. The picture is perfectly composed and the centre of interest is Vishnu seated on a lotus.



PLATE 7

THE BIRTH OF KRISHNA

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Mankot, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 12.3 in. × 8.0 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

Ugrasena had a brother whose daughter, Devakī, was married to Vasudeva, son of Shūra-sena. It was foretold that a son of Devakī would destroy Kāṁsa. To forestall his doom Kāṁsa kept Vasudeva and Devakī confined in a prison in his palace and ensured that the first six children whom Devakī bore were put to death. When she conceived her seventh child, it was miraculously transferred from her womb to that of Rohinī who was Vasudeva's second wife. This child was Balarama later to be Krishna's constant companion. Devakī's eighth child was Krishna. At the time of his birth the palace prison was filled with a radiance. The child was cloud-coloured, moon-faced, lotus-eyed, girdled with a robe of yellow silk, wearing a five-element necklace—sapphire for earth, pearl for water, ruby for fire, topaz for air, and diamond for ether. He was wearing a golden crown decorated with lotuses, and his four arms were holding the conch shell, the discus, the lotus, and the club. On seeing him Vasudeva and Devakī worshipped him with folded hands for they realized that he was an incarnation of Vishnu (Plate 7). The prison guards fell into a profound slumber. Vasudeva put the child into a winnowing basket, crossed the Jamuna in a storm and reached Gokul. He exchanged the child with the new-born daughter of Nanda and Yashodā and returned to the prison.

The birth of Krishna ushered in an era of prosperity for Vraja. Towns and villages were full of happiness, the rivers were brimming with water, and lakes were filled with pink lotuses. Bees hummed with joy, and birds sang in the mango groves. The winds wafted the fragrance of flowers of the forest trees, and in the sky appeared clusters of bright stars. Men and women exclaimed, 'There hath happened some mighty thing.'

This painting is from a series of paintings illustrating the anecdotes from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, purchased by the Punjab Museum from a descendant of the Rajas of Mankot. Most probably it was painted during the rule of Tredhi Singh (1710-30) or Azmat Dev (1730-60).

सूक्तमन्तरमध्यावस्था

3



PLATE 8

KRISHNA SWALLOWS THE FOREST FIRE

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Tira-Sujanpur, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 11.2 in. × 8.4 in., Collection of Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, Kangra Valley

In the house of Nanda, the headman of Gokul, Krishna grew up. Even as a baby he killed many demons sent by Kaṇsa to destroy him. He killed Pūtanā, a demoness, Shakaṭasura, and Trīṇavarta, the whirlwind demon. Nanda escaped from Gokul to Vrindāvan to save the child. In the forest of Vrindāvan, Krishna had many adventures. He killed the demon Bachchhāsura, who appeared in the form of a calf, and Bakāsura who appeared as a giant crane. Then he destroyed Aghāsura, a demon who appeared in the form of a python.

One day Krishna was grazing the cows in the forest with Balarama and other cowherd lads. The god Agni was annoyed with Krishna, as he was not receiving his accustomed worship. He decided to humiliate Krishna, and raised a tremendous forest fire. All the cowherds were greatly alarmed, and the cows ran helter-skelter. The cows herded together looking helplessly towards Krishna. The flames of the fire consumed the forest trees with their red tongues. When they saw the conflagration closing in upon them, the cowherd boys shouted, "O Krishna, O Krishna, save us from this fire; or we will be burnt to death." Krishna said, "Do you all shut your eyes." When they shut their eyes, Krishna in the twinkling of an eye drank up the fire.

In this painting the forest is shown by a circle of trees. This is a convention of Basohli painting seen in pictures of *Gīta Govinda* series also. The trees as well as cattle are highly stylized.



PLATE 9

KRISHNA STEALING THE CLOTHES OF COWHERDESSES

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Tira-Sujanpur, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 11.3 in. × 8.2 in., Collection of Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, Kangra Valley

In the first month of winter the cowherdresses of Vraja observed a fast in honour of goddess Kātyāyanī. Then they, collectively, went to an unfrequented *ghat* to bathe, and having gone there and taken off their clothes entered the water, and began to sport. At that very time Krishna also, seated in the shade of a fig-tree, was grazing cows, and overhearing the songs silently approached and observed the bathers. As he gazed, something entered his mind, and he stole all the clothes and ascended a Kadamba tree. Hereupon, when the cowherdresses looked and saw there were no clothes on the bank, then in alarm, rising upon all sides, they began to look about and to say among themselves, "Just now not even a bird came here; who has taken away the clothes!" In the meantime a cowherdess saw that, with a crown on his head, wearing a necklace of wild flowers, Krishna was concealed in the Kadamba tree. On seeing him she cried, "Friends, behold him, the stealer of our hearts, the stealer of clothes, on the Kadamba tree, holding the bundle, seated resplendent." Hearing this speech, and all the young women having seen Krishna, they felt ashamed, entered the water, joined their hands, bowed their heads and supplicated :

"Compassionate to the humble, beloved remover of grief,
O Mohan, please give us our clothes."

Hearing this, Krishna says :

"I will not give thus,
Come out one by one, then you will receive your clothes."

When the soul goes forth into the darkness of the unconditioned to meet the Supreme Being to yield herself to Him, she goes in all her nakedness.

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God.

—WORDSWORTH

सुक्ष्मीसैवमित्रवरकीर्तमीरव्यर्थवीष्टे



PLATE 10

KRISHNA LIFTING THE MOUNTAIN GOVARDHANA

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Tira-Sujanpur, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 11.3 in. × 8.4 in., Collection of Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, Kangra Valley

When Krishna was in Vraja, he saw the cowherds making preparations to celebrate the festival of Indra, the God of Rain. When Krishna asked Nanda about the significance of Indra and his worship, Nanda replied, "Indra is the Lord of Rain, by whose favour grass, water and food are produced, trees blossom and fruit, and all living beings remain in happiness."

On this Krishna said, "A living being is born as a result of his actions and disappears similarly, and pleasure and pain are also results of his actions. Therefore of what use is Indra to beings who are acting in accordance with their *karma*. As for the rain, it is the Sun which is its cause; for eight months the Sun dries up the water, and the same Sun in four months causes rain to fall; from this alone earth, grass, water and food are produced. We are dwellers in woods, and it is the mountains and forests who nourish us. He who nourishes, his worship alone is proper. So let us worship the woods, streams, and the mountains."

Nārada informed Indra that in Vraja his worship had been stopped. Indra got infuriated and set in action hosts of annihilating cloud, called Samvartaka, which appear at the time of the deluge of the Universe. The district of Vraja was submerged under a torrent of rain and cows began to shiver due to cold and the cowherds and gopis sought refuge in Krishna. Krishna lifted the Govardhana mountain with his little finger, and all the inhabitants of Vraja came with their cattle and stood beneath it. Krishna held up the mountain for seven days surrounded by the gopis, gopas, their children and cattle. Indra himself came on his white elephant and tried to infuse courage in his cloud armies, but was compelled to acknowledge defeat. On seeing the power of Krishna, Indra then reflected: "The Primeval Male has become incarnate, otherwise who could lift a mountain for so long." With his pride gone, and his power shattered, Indra withdrew his cloud armies. He offered Kāmadhenu, his heavenly milch cow, to Krishna, and hailed him as the Lord of the Cows. Krishna pardoned Indra, and asked him not to be proud again, because from being proud knowledge departs, evil ideas increase, and from this disgrace results.

In this painting, Krishna is shown having respite from his toil; Nanda, Balarama, and a cowherd lad are holding the mountain, while Krishna is playing the flute in a triumphant mood.



**'RAPTURE FILLS MY HEART WHEN I HEAR THE SOUND
OF THAT FLUTE'**

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Tira-Sujanpur, *circa* 1730-50 A.D.

Size 11.3 in. × 8.6 in., Collection of Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, Kangra Valley

Have you heard the sound of the flute in the silence of the night in the mountains? How its music penetrates the innermost recesses of the heart! In this painting Krishna is serenading Radha who is listening to the music of the flute from the balcony of her house. Framed by the colourful leaves of the window, she appears like a painted image. Standing near Krishna is a cowherd boy with a stick on his shoulder holding a lotus bud. On the sight of the moon-like face of Radha, the lotus closes. The custom of serenading is not entirely Western; it was prevalent even in the Punjab hills about 40 years ago. At the fairs young men could be seen playing the flute, or singing folk-songs to young women who sat in groups on hillocks.

The music of Krishna's flute holds men and even cattle spellbound. How it affects Radha is thus described by the poet Vidyāpati :

"How can I tell the limits of my grief, my dear ?
The blowing of that flute diffuses poison through my frame:
Insistently I hear it sounding,
And then my heart and body melt in shame.
In that supreme instant, my body fills to overflowing,
I dare not lift my eyes lest anyone should know of it:
With softest steps I walk about the house—
Rapture fills my heart and body, my girdle slips !"²⁰



PLATE 12

KRISHNA MILKING

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Basohli, circa 1750-55 A.D.

Size 10.3 in. x 7.4 in., Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu

In this lovely painting from Basohli, Krishna is shown milking a cow. Obviously he is more interested in the face of Radha who is holding the restless calf. Charmed by Krishna, the cow is also looking at him with affection and has even forgotten her calf. The liberal use of brilliant yellow in the background is suggestive of the sun-drenched landscape of Jammu in the hot months of May and June. While the low horizon and the lavish use of yellow and red pigments are the Basohli features of this painting, the beautiful rounded face of Radha is suggestive of Kangra style. Most probably it was painted during the last years of the rule of Jit Pal, say about 1750-55 A.D. when Kangra style had also become current. The subject selected by the artist is a familiar one, which has a particular appeal to millions of farmers over the length and breadth of the sub-continent of India. Here is an art written in a universal language—which tells us that beauty lies in familiar events of life. “The Holy Land is the land of our own experience : and if beauty is not apparent to us in the well-known, we shall not find it in things that are strange and far-away.”²¹



PLATE 13

THE DIVERSION OF THE JAMUNA

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Basohli, circa 1730 A.D.

Size 12.2 in. × 8.3 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

The remembrance of life in the forests and cow-pens of Vraja came to Balarama at Dwaraka. Along with Krishna he visited Nanda and Yashodā at Gokul. He saw cows wandering about in the woods, lowing and panting, their mouths open and not eating grass in their distress on account of separation from Krishna. The young women of Vraja with emaciated bodies and dishevelled hair were in deep despondency. On seeing Balarama and getting the news of Krishna their spirits revived, and they danced with him. One night while dancing with the milkmaids Balarama under the influence of wine commanded the Jamuna to flow to his feet so that he might bathe conveniently. Said Balarama angrily:

“Jamuna, do thou flow here, and bathe me with thy streams;

If thou shalt not obey my words, thy waters shall be divided into several portions.”

Jamuna, in her conceit, paid no attention to what Balarama said, and he angrily drew her towards himself with his plough, and bathed. The bend in the river at Gokul remains to this day.

Balarama is also known as Haladhara or bearer of the plough and is worshipped as the god of agriculture. The painting bears the following inscription on the back :

वहसि वपुषि विशदे वसनं जलदाभं
हलहतिभीतिमिलितयमुनाम् ।
केशवधृत हलधर रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥

Vahasi vapusि vishade vasanam jaladābhām
Halahati bhti milita yamunābhām
Keshavadhṛta Haladhara rūpa
Jaya jagadīsha hare.

“Keshava, salutations to Thee in Thy Haladhara form with Thy fair person resplendent in its azure mantle. It looks as though the Jamuna, fearful of Thy plough, has vested Thee with her treasured charm.”

This painting is out of a large series illustrating the anecdotes from *Bhāgavata*, possibly by the same artist who painted the *Gita Govinda* series, and can be approximately dated circa 1730-40 A.D. The Jamuna is shown as a small girl draped in red, holding a golden vessel following the plough of Balarama. Krishna is embracing a cowherd lad in the right corner, and cows are grazing peacefully in the pasture-land painted green in the background.



PLATE 14

THE MAGIC OF KRISHNA'S FLUTE

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Basohli, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 8.1 in. × 6.2 in., National Museum, New Delhi

The sound of Krishna's flute holds the entire creation, animate as well as inanimate, spellbound. It is something more than a flute. "It is the voice of Eternity heard by the dwellers in Time." It is thus that the virtues of Krishna's flute are extolled in *Prema-sāgara*, the Hindi version of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

"One day Krishna played his flute in the woods. Hearing the sound of the flute, all the young women of Vraja arose precipitately and ran. Meeting in the forest they began to say among themselves, 'Our eyes will be fully gratified when they obtain a sight of Krishna.' On hearing the notes of the flute, a cowherdess said :

'Listen, Friend, when he is playing the flute, animals and birds find gratification. Devi, with her lord, reclined in the car; their ears, hearing the sound, were fascinated. Bracelet and ring fall from the hand, the sound has stolen away recollection from the perturbed mind and body.'

Just then says a woman of Vraja :

'The clouds, quite overcome, left off thundering; Hari is singing with unwavering delight; eyebrows, hand, and cheek, he sways to the metre; The doe, with her loved one, hearing the flute, is brought to a standstill; the Jamuna is deflected, the cows are there collected together. The fascinated clouds form a shade, like an umbrella held over Krishna.'

Another said :

'Listen, friend, he plays on the flute, behold the greatness of the bamboo tube, How is there in it so much virtue, that all day it continues applied to the mouth of Krishna, drinking the nectar of his lips, and raining delight? Why is this more loved than even us, that night and day he continues holding it? This thing made in my presence, has become a rival wife. What mortification has this one inflicted on itself, and obtained such a reward as this?'

Hearing this remark, a cowherdess replied : 'First, then, this, having been produced in the tube of a bamboo, constantly remembered Hari; afterwards, it endured heat, cold, and water; lastly, having become fragments and burnt itself, it inhaled the smoke.'

Hearing this, a woman of Vraja said : 'Why did not Krishna make us flutes, that, night and day, we had remained with him?'" 22

"All art aspires towards the condition of music," says Pater. If it could be true of any painting, it is certainly so about this Basohli masterpiece. In it we find harmony of colour as well as form. It has balance and rhythm. The eyes of the cowherdesses as well as of the cows are glued at the central figure of Krishna. The graceful swaying branches of the two willows unite all the figures in a single indivisible harmony.



PLATE 15

KRISHNA BRINGING THE PĀRIJĀTA FROM INDRA'S HEAVEN

Illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Tira-Sujanpur, circa 1780 A.D.

Size 11.3 in. x 8.6 in., Collection of Raja Dhruv Dev Chand of Lambagraon, Kangra Valley

The Pārijāta tree, one of the products of the churning of the 'Ocean of Milk', was planted by Indra in his garden. "Its bark was of gold, and it was embellished with young sprouting leaves of a copper colour and fruit stalks bearing numerous clusters of fragrant fruits." Nārada, who delighted in sowing discord, brought a flower of this tree to Dwaraka and presented it to Krishna. He waited to see to which of his wives Krishna would give the flower. Krishna gave it to Rukmini whereupon Nārada wearing a sorrowful look went straight to Satyabhāmā, Krishna's other consort. On her enquiring why he was sad, the sage replied that he had presented Krishna with a flower of the Pārijāta tree thinking that he would present it to her, his favourite wife, but was grieved to find that he had given it to Rukmini instead. Satyabhāmā's jealousy was roused, and she asked Nārada as to what could be done to spite Rukmini. The sage advised her to ask Krishna to bring the Pārijāta tree itself to Dwaraka, and plant it near her abode. After giving this advice he went back to the celestial region, and informed Indra that thieves were about, and that he should guard Pārijāta tree with care.

Satyabhāmā repaired to the 'anger chamber' and when Krishna came to her, she said, "You say that I am your favourite wife, but you treat me as Rukmini's handmaid." She asked him as to what had made him present the Pārijāta flower to Rukmini. Krishna admitted his fault and asked her what he could do to expiate it. Satyabhāmā replied that she would not be satisfied with anything less than the Pārijāta tree itself. Krishna proceeded to Amaravati, stole into Indra's gardens and uprooted the Pārijāta tree. Mounted on Garuḍa, he escaped with the tree but Indra, warned by Nārada, followed him. A battle followed and Indra was defeated and Krishna brought the tree to Dwaraka. Now he had to face the problem of fulfilling his promise to Satyabhāmā without offending Rukmini. He solved the problem by planting the tree in such a position that while its base and trunk lay within Satyabhāmā's garden, its branches extended over the adjoining palace of Rukmini, scattering flowers early in the morning. The Pārijāta tree has been identified as '*Har Singār*' (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) which sheds its flowers at night time when they exhale exquisite fragrance.

In this painting Krishna is shown riding the Garuḍa, warding off Indra's attack. Behind Krishna is Nārada holding a *veena* and the Pārijāta tree. Indra is riding his white elephant. Note the marks on Indra's body. In ancient mythology, Indra is known as *Sahasrākṣa*, or the Thousand-Eyed One. Also note that the painting partly projects out of the frame into the yellow border. This is also a characteristic feature of some Basohli paintings.



PLATE 16

DEPARTURE OF RAMA AND LAKSHMANA TO THE FOREST

Illustration to the *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa*

Kulu, circa 1670-88 A.D.

Size 12.5 in. x 8.6 in., Collection of Raja Raghbir Singh of Shangri, Kulu Valley

The great Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyaṇa* was a favourite text of the hill painters at Basohli as well as Kulu. Plates 16-18 are from the collection of Raja Raghbir Singh of Shangri in Kulu Valley. The *Rāmāyaṇa* provides a social ideal and tells how man by righteous conduct may approach to a nearer union with God. Rama is the ideal son who volunteers for exile so that the pledge given by his father may be fulfilled. Lakshmana is the ideal brother who suffers the hardships of life in the forest so that he may serve his brother. Sita is the ideal wife, perfection of beauty, goodness, faithfulness and loyal love. The *Rāmāyaṇa* continues to exercise a profound influence on the Hindus of India. "The beauty of Rama's person and character, the wonder of his exploits and the high moral principles that underlie his every thought and word and deed have been an inspiration and example to generations of pious Hindus. The loyalty of Lakshmana, so human and impulsive, the unselfish devotion of Bharata, who wished to avoid even the appearance of evil, and the utter faithfulness of Sita to her lord in good and evil circumstance alike—all these have won the hearts of men and women who see in them what they themselves ought and long to be."²³

The *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed by the sage Vālmiki about five centuries before Christ. It was translated into Hindi by Tulasidas in 1574 A.D., and his Hindi version *Rāmācharitamānasa* is most popular in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh even now. The Pahari artists have followed a recension of Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Briefly, the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* is as follows : Dasharatha, the king of Ayodhyā was childless. He performed the *putreṣṭi yajña*. Out of the sacrificial fire appeared Vishnu who gave him a pot of nectar for his wives to drink. Subsequently Rama was born to the eldest wife Kaushalyā, Bharata to Kaikeyi, and Lakshmana and Shatrughna to Sumitrā. The four brothers grew up together at Ayodhyā. The sage Vishvamitra was living in the forest practising austerities, but his sacrifices were being disturbed by the demons Māricha and Subāhu. He approached Dasharatha and asked him for the help of Rama and Lakshmana. Reluctantly Dasharatha agreed, and entrusted them to the sage. In this painting are shown Rama and Lakshmana, one dark, one fair, equipped with bows and arrows, riding a chariot, coming to meet their father Dasharatha who is seated on a golden throne. A soldier with folded hands is announcing their arrival. The tree separating the chariot of Rama and Lakshmana from the palace of Dasharatha is highly stylized. The green background is symbolic of the forest to which the princes are departing. In the hermitage of Vishvamitra, Rama killed the female demon Tārakā. Vishvamitra supplied Rama with celestial weapons. He afterwards took him and his brother to Mithilā, where Rama broke the bow of Shiva and married Sita, the princess of Videha.



THE SORROW OF RAMA
 Illustration to the *Rāmāyaṇa, Kishkindhākāṇḍa*

Kulu, circa 1670-88 A.D.

Size 12.6 in. × 8.4 in., Collection of Raja Raghbir Singh of Shangri, Kulu Valley

On his return from Mithilā to Ayodhyā, preparations were made for the installation of Rāma on the throne. But Mantharā, the spiteful hunchbacked servant of Kaikeyi, aroused strong feelings of jealousy in her mistress, who was the favourite wife of Dasharatha. Rama was exiled for fourteen years, and along with Sita and Lakshmana he took up abode in the Dandaka forest. Dasharatha died a broken-hearted old man soon after, and Bharata who was called upon to ascend the throne declined. At last after a good deal of persuasion he agreed to act as his brother's vicegerent. From Chitrakuta, Rama moved on to Panchavati on the river Godavari. Here Shūrpaṇakhā, a sister of the demon Ravana, King of Ceylon, saw him and fell in love with him. He repelled her advances and Lakshmana cut off her ears and nose. She returned to Ceylon, and by her description inspired Ravana with a wild passion for Sita. While Rama and Lakshmana were decoyed away by Māricha, who appeared in the form of a golden deer, Ravana who came in the guise of a mendicant carried off Sita by force to Ceylon. Rama's despair on the loss of Sita was terrible. The two brothers reached Kishkindhā, the modern Hampi on the Tungabhadra, and assisted Sugriva against his brother Vāli. Rama and Lakshmana are here shown on the Mount Pavarsana, where they spent the night. The rains were over and autumn had begun. The sky was cloudless, and the autumn moon shone with unusual brilliance. Rama said to Lakshmana, "The rains are over and the clear season of autumn is here, but, brother, we have no news of Sita. If I could once hear tidings of her, however it might be, I should bring her back in a moment, though I should have to conquer Death himself. Wherever she may be, if she be still alive, brother, I shall strive to rescue her and bring her back."²⁴ The dark night and the star-spangled sky are beautifully depicted in this painting.

This painting and a number of others illustrating the events from *Āranyakāṇḍa* and *Kishkindhākāṇḍa* are in a different style from others in Raja Raghbir Singh's collection. Paintings in this style have also been collected from Rampur-Bushahr, on the left bank of the Sutlej in Himachal Pradesh.



॥ एवं गुरु गुरु गुरु गुरु ॥

PLATE 18

SITA, LAVA AND KUSHA IN THE HERMITAGE OF VĀLMĪKI

Illustration to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Uttarakāṇḍa*

Kulu, circa 1670-88 A.D.

Size 12.3 in. × 8.6 in., Collection of Raja Raghbir Singh of Shangri, Kulu Valley

Now follows a great war for the recovery of Sita. In this war Rama was aided by Hanuman, son of the wind, Sugriva and his army of monkeys and bears, and Vibhishana, brother of Ravana. After many fiercely contested battles, the city of Laṅkā was taken, Ravana killed and Sita rescued. Rama had doubts about the purity of Sita; he received her coldly and refused to take her back. Sita proved her innocence by the ordeal of fire; she entered the flames boldly, and the god Agni led her forth placing her in Rama's arms unscathed. Rama then returned to Ayodhyā and was crowned King of Ayodhyā.

Now follows the last section of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Some of the subjects of Rama continued to doubt the purity of Sita and hearing reports of scandalous conversation of a washerman and his wife, Rama sent Sita to the hermitage of Vālmiki. There her twin sons, Lava and Kusha, were born. In this painting Lava and Kusha are shown receiving instruction from Vālmiki, and in the background is Sita seated at the entrance of her hut. The green, blue and red foliage of the trees is highly stylized. The vibrant yellow background lends a pleasant note to the painting, one of the finest in the series.

Vālmiki taught the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the boys which they memorized. When they were about fifteen years old, they came to Ayodhyā and recited the *Rāmāyaṇa* before Rama. When they narrated the sufferings of Sita in captivity at Laṅkā, and later on in the forest hermitage, Rama realized his mistake and brought Sita back. Sita returned and in a public assembly declared her purity, and called upon mother earth to verify her words. The earth opened up and received her back.

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PLATE 19

'HAIL, KESHAVA, HAIL ! RULER OF WAVE AND WOOD !'

Illustration to the *Gita Govinda*

Basohli, 1730 A.D.

Size 12.2 in. x 8.5 in., National Museum, New Delhi

Jayadeva, the author of the immortal Sanskrit poem, *Gita Govinda*, was the court poet of Lakshmana Sena (1170 A.D.) the last Hindu king of Bengal. *Gita Govinda* or the "Song of the Cowherd" is a type of oriental opera in which the love of Radha and Krishna is described. In brief the story of the poem is as follows : After paying homage to the ten incarnations of Vishnu, Jayadeva describes how the love of Radha and Krishna began on the bank of the Jamuna. Then follows a delightful description of spring, and he describes the sports of Krishna with the cowherdresses. Ignored by Krishna, heart-broken Radha retires to a bower, and her maid describes how Krishna wanders with the pretty cowherd girls. After some time Krishna feels penitent, searches for Radha, and on not finding her, laments for her. The female messenger now goes to Radha, and tells her of the longing of Krishna for her. Ultimately she persuades Radha to meet Krishna in a bower. When the night of love is over, Radha rises, and finding herself disarrayed, indulges in love-play, and asks her lover to arrange her hair, clothes and ornaments.

This is an illustration of the following lines from Canto I of *Gita Govinda* in which Jayadeva pays homage to Vishnu in his incarnation as the giant tortoise :

क्षितिरति विपुल तरे तिष्ठति तव पृष्ठे
धरणिधारणकिणचकगरिष्ठे ।
केशव धृतकच्छपरूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥

Kṣhitirati vipula tare tiṣṭhati tava priṣṭhe
dharaṇi dhāraṇa kiṇa chakra gariṣṭhe
Keshava dhṛta kachchhaparūpa
Jaya Jagadīsha hare.

"Keshava ! I bow to Thee in Thy Tortoise-form holding the great earth on Thy back which has become horny in consequence."

Sir Edwin Arnold translates it as follows :

"The round world rested on thy spacious nape;
Upon thy neck, like a mere mole, it stood:
O thou that took'st for us the Tortoise-shape,
Hail, Keshava, Hail ! Ruler of wave and wood !"

Gopis are shown adoring Krishna; one of them is reverently touching his feet, another is holding a white *chauri*, and yet another is bowing to him with folded hands. Krishna is embracing two of the gopis. In the background is the charming forest of Vrindāvan, and in the foreground is the Jamuna. The vibrant orange background lends a strange luminous quality to this painting, one of the most charming of the *Gita Govinda* series.



PLATE 20

THE ECSTASY OF LOVE

Illustration to the *Gita Govinda*

Basohli, 1730 A.D.

Size 12.0 in. x 8.4 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

Gita Govinda is a song based on vital experience, and its rich imagery, entrancing music, and passionate love pictures have given joy to many. This is an illustration of the following verse from Canto I of *Gita Govinda*:

पद्मापयोधरतटीपरिरम्भलग्न
काश्मीरमुद्रितमुरो मधुसूदनस्य ।
व्यक्तानुरागमिव खेलदनंगखेद
स्वेदांबुपूरमनुपूरयतु प्रियं वः ॥

Padmā payodharataḥ parirambha lagna
Kāshmīra mudritamuro Madhusūdanasya
Vyaktānurāgamiva kheladananga kheda
Svedāmbupūramanupūrayatu priyam vah.

"The saffron painted breasts of Lakshmi leave their fragrant imprint on the chest of Madhusudan. They perspire from the ardour of their embraces, as though love were oozing from its very excess. May this divine ecstasy bring you blessing!"

In this stanza of Jayadeva's poem God himself is shown making love. In this painting, Vishnu and his spouse Lakshmi, or Krishna and Radha, seated under a tree on the bank of the Jamuna gazing at each other with passion-filled eyes are lost in rapture. In the pavilion to the right a gopi describes to her companion the course of their love. The pointed crowns of the trees and the sun-drenched landscape are symbolic of the passion of lovers.

The union of lovers is the most exalted experience in life. In the ecstasy of love, joy is pin-pointed, self is forgotten, and two become one. The supreme joy thus achieved is the experience of lovers as well as poets and mystics. The Hindu poets and mystics in their inspired poetry interpreted the union of God and Soul in the beautiful imagery of human love, for any other vocabulary is too inadequate to express such an experience. The marriage of the Soul with God is the end for which the Soul is created, and ultimately the flame of life joins the Source of Light. As Puran Singh says: "Jayadeva employs the fiery sense of passion to colour his music; he uses the highest symbols of life to make the love of God a reality to man. The whole song of the *Gita Govinda* is pervaded by that supreme creative feeling which divides reality into the two illusive forms of male and female, and makes them dance like two flames of life, till the measure of perfection is fulfilled by all forms vanishing again into one."²⁵

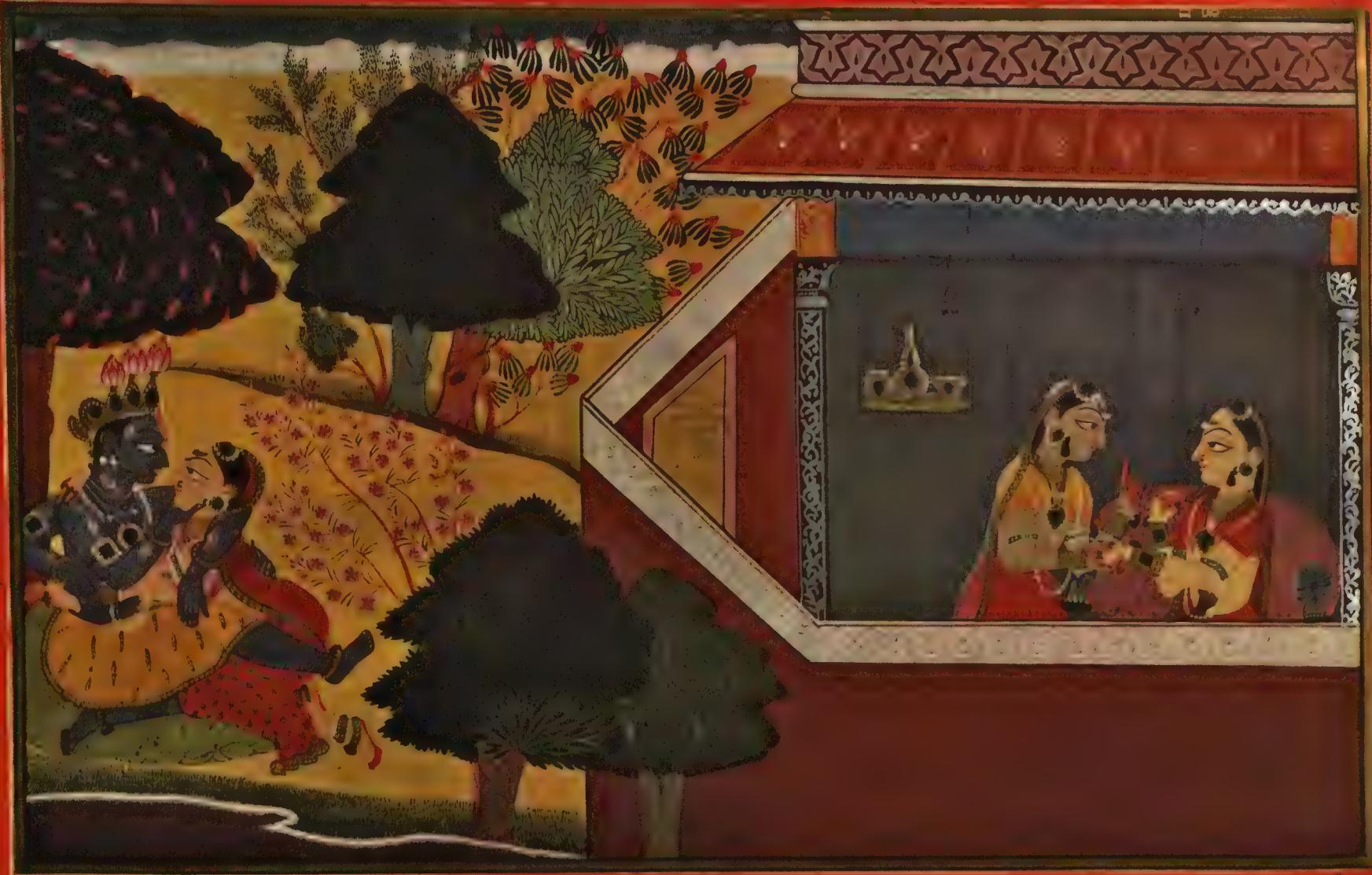


PLATE 21

THE SOUTH WIND COOLS ITSELF IN THE
SNOW OF THE HIMALAYAS

Illustration to the *Gita Govinda*

Basohli, 1730 A.D.

Size 12.2 in. x 8.4 in., National Museum, New Delhi

This is an illustration of the following verses from Canto I of *Gita Govinda*.

ग्रदोत्तंगवसद्भुजंगकवलक्षेशादिवेशाचलम्,
प्रालेयप्लवनेच्छयाज्ञुसररति श्रीखण्डशैलानिलः ।
किञ्च स्निग्धरसालमौलिमुकुलान्यालोक्य हर्षोदयाद्
उन्मीलन्ति कुहुः कुहुरिति कलोत्तालाः पिकानां गिरः ॥

Adyotsainga-vasad-bhujanga-kavala-kleshadiveshachalam
Prāleya-plavanecchayā-nusarati shri-khanda-shailā-nilah.
Kiñcha snigdha-rasāla-mauli mukulānyālokya harśo-dayā-
dunmilanti kuhuh-kuhuriti kalottālāḥ pikānām girah.

"The south wind blowing from the forests of Mount Shrikhand, afflicted as it were by the poison of the serpents coiling around the sandal trees, turns northwards and dives into the snow of the Himalayas to cool itself. The *koels* are full of joy at the sight of buds on the fresh and green mango trees, and the forest is ringing with their joyful cries."

This painting is the only example of a pure landscape by Basohli artists, in which human figures are not shown. Their conception of sandal trees which are found in Mysore State of South India is purely imaginary. As these artists lived in the outer hills 2000-3000 feet in altitude, they also had no idea of Himalayan glaciers and alpine vegetation. This explains the manner in which they have painted the snow in the crags of mountains, and the trees.



PLATE 22

SPORTS OF KRISHNA IN SPRING TIME

Illustration to the *Gita Govinda*

Basohli, 1730 A.D.

Size 12.0 in. x 8.3 in., National Museum, New Delhi

Krishna is sporting with pretty cowherd girls, ignoring Radha. It is the charming season of spring when trees are laden with flowers, and the earth appears like a young bride.

The spring breeze laden with the fragrance of *keora* perfumes the woods, and kindles thoughts of love. The maid of Radha thus addresses her: "O Radha, in this charming season, which gives pain to separated lovers, young Hari sports and dances with a company of damsels." The jealous Radha gave no answer. The damsel again addresses Radha: "There is he with a garland of wild flowers descending even to the yellow mantle that girds his azure limbs, distinguished by smiling cheeks and by ear-rings that sparkle as he plays, bursting into a love-song. Krishna exults in the assemblage of amorous damsels. One of them presses him with her swelling breast, another love-frenzied by a glance from his eye has fixed her gaze on his lotus face. A third one, on pretence of whispering a secret in his ear, approaches his temples, and kisses them with ardour. One seizes his mantle and draws him towards her, pointing to the bower on the banks of the Jamuna, where elegant bamboos interweave their branches and in the shade a feast of golden red mangoes and milk is laid."

This painting bears the following inscription on the back:

गोपकदंबनितंववतीमुखचुंबनलंभितलोभम्।
बंधुजीवमधुराधरपल्लवमूलसितस्मितशोभम्॥

Gopa kadamba nitambavati mukha chumbana lambhita lobham.
Bandhujiva madhurādhara pallavamullasita smitashobham.

"He looks very handsome when kissing young cowherdresses, whose soft smiles and honey-sweet lips put blossoms of Bandhujīva to shame."



PLATE 23

HOW KRISHNA WANTONED IN THE WOOD

Illustration to the *Gīta Govinda*

Basohli, 1730 A.D.

Size 12.1 in. x 8.4 in., National Museum, New Delhi

'Then she, the maid of Radha, spake again;
And pointing far away between the leaves
Guided her lovely Mistress where to look,
And note how Krishna wantoned in the wood
Now with this one, now that; his heart, her prize,
Panting with foolish passions, and his eyes
Beaming with too much love for those fair girls—
Fair, but not so as Radha !'²⁴

The painting bears the following inscription :

विपुलपुलकभुजपल्लववलयितवल्लवयुवतिसहस्रम् ।
करचरणोरसि मणिगणभूषणकिरणविभ्रतमिस्रम् ॥

Vipula pulaka bhuja pallava valayita vallava yuvati sahasram
Kara charanorasi manigana bhusa na kira na vibhinna tamisram.

"The companion of Radha describing the splendour and beauty of Krishna says, 'When Hari full of joy embraces thousands of beautiful young women in his arms, the gems on his ornaments sparkle brilliantly, and darkness flees away'."



PLATE 24

REPENTANCE OF KRISHNA

Illustration to the *Gīta Govinda*

Basohli, 1730 A.D.

Size 12.2 in. \times 8.2 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

In this painting Krishna is shown in a repentant mood expressing his sorrow to cowherd boys, who are sitting in front of him. There is no mention of cowherd boys in the poem itself, and it seems that it is an innovation of the Basohli master painter who painted the *Gita Govinda* paintings. In the illustration of the same theme in Kangra series of *Gita Govinda* paintings sorrowful Krishna is shown alone under a willow tree.

It is thus that Jayadeva describes the repentance of Krishna in Canto III of *Gita Govinda*:

किं करिष्यति किं वदिष्यति सा चिरं विरहेण ।
 किं बनेन जनेन कि मम जीवितेन मुखेन ॥
 चित्तयामि तदाननं कुटिलभ्रु कोपभरेण ।
 शोणपद्मिमोपरि भ्रमताकुलं भ्रमरेण ॥
 तामहं हृदि संगतामनिशं भशं रमयामि ।
 कि वनेनुसरामि तामिहं कि वृथा विलपामि ॥
 तन्मित्रिभ्रमसूयथा हृदयं तदाकलयामि ।
 तज्जवेषि कुतो गतासि न तेन तेजनुनयामि ॥
 दृश्यते पुरुतो गतागतमेव मे विदधासि ।
 कि पुरेव ससं भ्रमं परिरम्भण न ददासि ॥
 क्षम्यतामपरं कदापि तवेदृशं न करोमि ।
 देहि सुंदरि दर्शनं मम मन्मथेन दुलोमि ॥
 वर्णितं जयदेवकेन हरेरिदं प्रणतेन ।
 केन्द्रिविल्वसमुद्दसं भवरोहिणीरमणेन ॥
 ॥ इति श्री गीतगोरोक्तिर्विदे सप्तमं गीतम् ॥

Kim kariyati kim vadiyati sā chirām viraheṇa
 Kim dhanena janena kim mama jīvitena sukhena
 Chiṇṭayāmī tadānanām kuṭīlabhrū kopabhareṇa
 Shoṇapadmamivopari bhramatākulam bhramareṇa
 Tāmahaṇī hṛdi saṅgatāmanishaṇī bhṛshamī ramayāmī
 Kim vanē'nuśarāmī tāmīha kim vṛthā vilapāmī
 Tanvi khinnamasūyayā hṛdayam tavākalayāmī
 Tanna vedmi kuto gatāśi na tena te'nuṇayāmī
 Dṛṣhyate purato gatāgatameva me vidadhāsi
 Kim pureva sasambhramam parirambhaṇam na dadāsi
 Kṣhamyatāmaparamā kadāpi tavedṛṣhaṇī na karomi
 Dehi sundari darshanam mama manmathena dunomi
 Varṇitam Jayadevakena Hareridam prānatena
 Kenduvilva samudrasambhava rohiṇīramanena.
 Iti shri Gita Govinde saptamam gitam.

"In my absence what would she do, and what would she say ? Without her life has lost its charm. I seem to behold her angry face with knitted eye-brows; it resembles a fresh lotus, over which two black bees are humming : Why then do I seek her in this forest ? Why do I lament without cause ? O slender damsel, anger, I know, has torn thy soft bosom; but whither thou art retired, I know not. How can I invite thee to return ? Thou art seen by me, indeed, in a vision; thou seemest to move before me. Ah ! why dost thou not rush as before to my embrace ? Do but forgive me. Grant me but a sight of thee, O lovely Radhika; for my passion torments me."



'ENTER THE BOWER OF LOVE, O BEAUTIFUL'

Illustration to the *Gita Govinda*

Basohli, 1730 A.D.

Size 12.2 in. x 8.1 in., National Museum, New Delhi

After feeling penitent Krishna comes to Radha who rebukes him for his liberality in love. Krishna leaves, and Radha's female companions chide her for her obstinacy.

They ultimately persuade her to meet Krishna in his bower after dark. In this painting Radha is shown feeling shy and hesitant at the entrance of the bower in which Krishna is awaiting her. The inscription on the reverse of the painting is as below:

अधिगतमखिलसखीभिरिदं तव वपुरपि रतिरणसज्जम् ।
 चण्डि रणितरसनारवडिष्डिमभिसर सरसमलज्जम् ॥
 स्मरशारसुभगनखेन करेण सखीमवलम्ब्य सलीलम् ।
 चल वलयकवणितैरवबोधय हरिमपि निजगतिशीलम् ॥
 श्री जयदेव भणितमधरीकृतहारमुदासितवामम् ।
 हरिविनिहितमनसामधितिष्ठतु कण्ठतटीमविरामम् ॥
 ॥ इति श्री गीत गोविदे विंशतिमं गीतम् ॥

Adhigatamakhila sakhibhiridam tava vapurapi ratirana sajjam.
 Chanḍi raṇita rasanā rava ḍinqdimamabhisara sarasamalajjam.
 Smara shara subhaga nakhena kareṇa sakhimavalambya salilam.
 Chala valaya kvaṇitai rava bodhaya Harimapi nijagatishilam.
 Shri Jayadeva bhaṇitamadharikṛita hāramudāsita vāmaṇ.
 Hari vinihita manasāmadhi tiṣṭhatu kaṇṭhataṭimavirāmaṇ.
 Iti Shri Gita Govinde vinshatitamam gītaṇ.

"Radha ! *Sakis* have come to know your secret that your soul is intent on the warfare of love. Now throw away your shyness, let your girdle tinkle merrily and go ahead to meet your Lord.

Radha ! Lead with thee some favoured maid; grasp her hand with thine whose fingers are long and smooth as love's arrows. March, and let the jingle of your bangles proclaim your approach to your Lord.

This beautiful song of Jayadeva may always rest upon the lips of the devotees of Krishna."

Ultimately Radha accepts the advice of her companions. What follows is thus described by Jayadeva :

"Then she, no more delaying, entered straight;
 Her step a little faltered, but her face
 Shone with unutterable quick love; and—while
 The music of her bangles passed the porch—
 Shame, which had lingered in her downcast eyes,
 Departed shamed. . ."



PLATE 26

ON THE THRESHOLD OF YOUTH

Illustration to the *Rasamañjari*

Basohli, circa 1695 A.D.

Size 13.3 in. \times 9.4 in., Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu

Bhanu Datta, the author of *Rasamañjari*, classifies heroines into three classes : *Sviyā* (who loves only her husband), *Parakiyā* (who loves a person other than her husband), and *Sāmānyā* (impartial, who loves anybody). The *Sviyā* heroines are further classified into three categories according to age and experience : *Mugdhā* (youthful and inexperienced), *Madhyā* (the adolescent), and *Pragalbhā* (the mature).

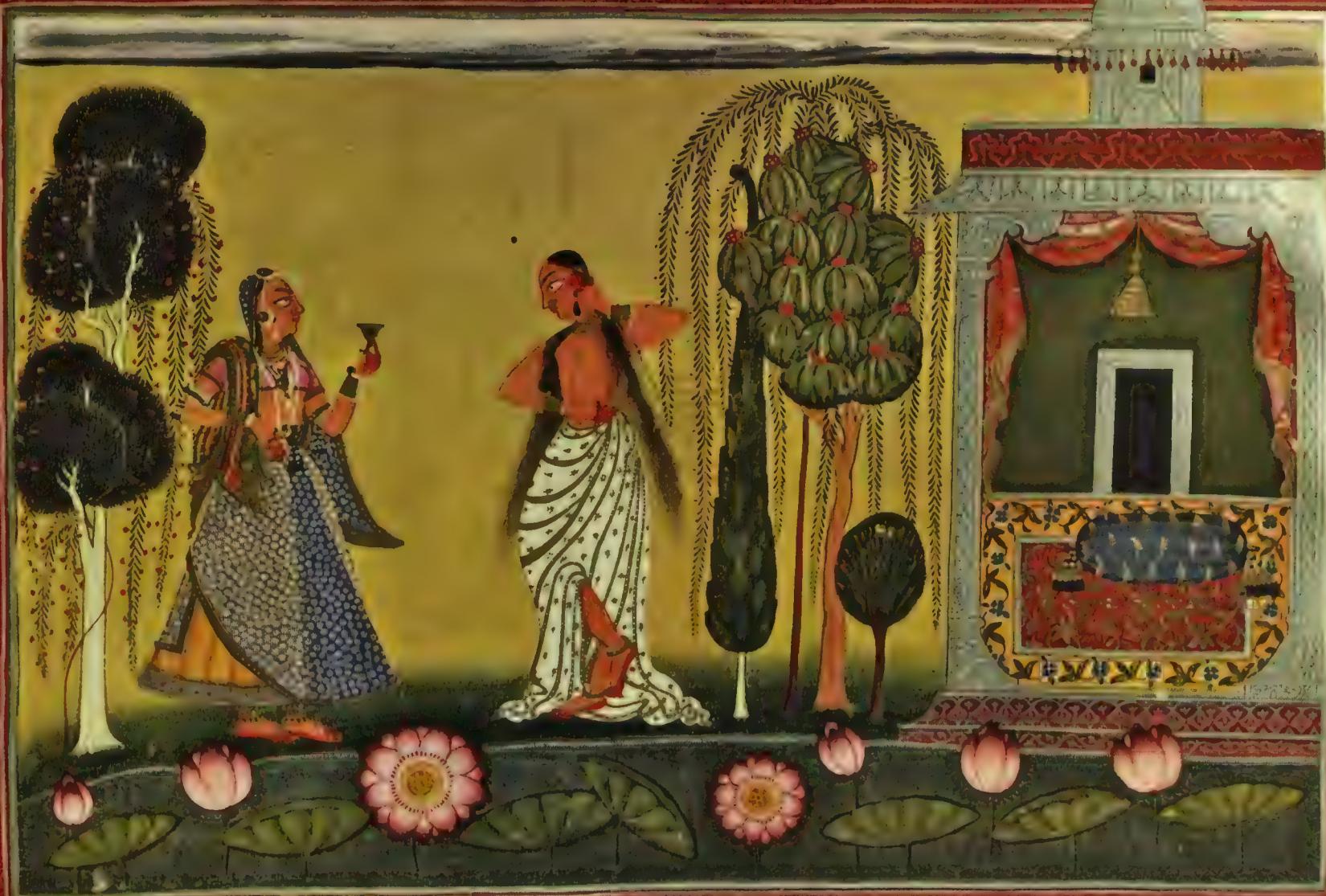
This painting of a *Mugdhā* heroine illustrates the feelings of a young girl on the threshold of youth, who is still not conscious of her youthful charms. Her tranquil eyes are troubled, and her restless feet reflect her heart's unrest. The lotuses in the foreground are also symbolic; the closed buds symbolize childhood, while the open flowers are symbols of youth. Childhood and youth are indeed face to face. The text on the reverse is as follows :

नीरातीरमुगागता श्रवणयोः सिम्नि स्फुरन्नेत्रयोः
श्रोत्रे लग्नमिदं किमुत्पलमिति ज्ञातुं करं न्यस्यति ।
शैवालाङ्कुरशंकया शशिमुखी रोमावलीं प्रोद्धति,
आन्तास्मीति मुहुः सखीमविदित श्रोणीभरा पृच्छति ॥

Nirāttiramupāgatā shravaṇayoh simni sphurannetrayoh
Shotre lagnamidam kimutpalamiti jñātum karam nyasyati
Shaivālāñkurashañkayā shashimukhi romāvalim prōñchhati
Shrāntāsmīti muhuḥ sakhimavidita shroñibharā pṛchchhati.

“Youth has come unknown. The *Nāyikā* with moon-like face stands drying herself beside the pool. Her full-blown eyes look like lotuses in the reflection, and thinking that perhaps the flowers have stuck to her ears, she moves her hands to brush them away. Next her eyes drift to the downy hair on her person which she mistakes for algae and tries to wipe off. Her hips feel heavy, and in virginal innocence she asks her companion again and again, ‘Can it be that I have tired?’”

અંગરેખાનગર



THE VIGIL OF THE EXPECTANT HEROINE

Chamba, *circa* 1760-80 A.D.

Size 10.2 in. x 7.4 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

Keshav Das classified the *Svakiyā* heroines according to circumstances of their relations with their lovers into eight types, the *Aṣṭanāyikās*. The eight *Nāyikās* are as follows :

Svādhinapatikā, she whose lord is subject to her will.

Utkā or *Utkanthitā*, she who expects her lover.

Vāsakaśayyā or *Vāsakasajjā*, she who expects her lord to return from a journey, and waits with the bed prepared.

Abhisamdhitā or *Kalahāntaritā*, she who repulses her lord when he seeks to soften her pride, and repents when it is already too late.

Khaṇḍitā, she whose lord has spent the night away from home; when he returns in the morning, she reproaches him bitterly.

Prośitapatikā, she whose lord has gone abroad, appointing a time of return; the day has come, but he has not yet returned.

Vipralabdha, she that keeps an appointment, but night passes without her lover coming.

Abhisārikā, she who goes out to seek her beloved.

This is a painting of *Utkā* or the expectant heroine, who is waiting at the trysting place holding the branch of a tree by the side of a bed of leaves. On her left is a lotus pond. Her anxiety is greatly roused at her lover's inability to keep his appointment with her at the promised hour. It is a pitch dark night, and the heroine draped in blue and red clothes appears like a dryad in an enchanted forest. Thus soliloquizes *Utkā* :

"Is it some business at home which detains him or the company of his friends, or is it some auspicious day of his fasting ? Was it a quarrel with some person or the dawning of divine wisdom which keeps him away from me ? Is he in pain, or is it some treachery that keeps him from meeting me, or the impeding waters, or the terrifying darkness of the night ? Or does he test my fidelity ? O my poor heart, you will never know the cause of his delay."

This painting is from Chamba and represents the last phase of the Basohli style in that State. While the artist uses the deep red and blue pigments, favourites of the Basohli artists, the figure of the lady has the beauty and tenderness of the Kangra *kalam*.



ON THE WAY TO THE TRYST

Illustration to the *Rasamañjari*

Basohli, circa 1690-95 A.D.

Size 12.8 in. x 8.9 in., Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu

The heroine is on the way to the tryst to meet Krishna. She is Parakiyā Abhisārikā, a heroine in love with a person who is not her husband. It is a dark night with heavy clouds and lightning. Rain pours in torrents, and the sky is lit up by snake-like flashes of lightning. Her companion asks her if she is not afraid of the storm and the darkness. The painting bears the following inscription, which is the reply of the Nāyikā to her friend :

रभसादभिसर्तुमुद्वतानं
वनितानां सखि वारिदो विवस्वान् ।
रजनी दिवसोऽधकारमच्च—
विपिनं वेश्म विमार्गं एव मार्गः ॥

Rabhasādabhisartumudyatānām
Vanitānām sakhi vārido vivasvān
Rajanī divaso'ndhakāramarchir—
Vipinām veshma vimārga eva mārgaḥ

"*Sakhi*, for a maiden on the way to love's tryst even threatening clouds are as the sun, the night as day, darkness as light, the jungle as home, and the pathless wilderness a smooth passage."

This is the loveliest painting of the *Rasamañjari* series from Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu. The eyes of the heroine are blazing with passion, and her breasts could hardly be contained in the bodice. Such is her eagerness to meet Krishna! Leaves spread on the ground are also pointed like arrow-heads suggestive of the passion of lovers. The trees with red flowers very much resemble Borass (*Rhododendron arboreum*) so common in the Western Himalayas. This painting relates to the reign of Kirpal Pal. Discussing the aesthetic quality of the paintings of this period, Khandalavala rightly observes, "The aesthetic merits of the early Basohli miniatures of Kirpal Pal's time are uniformly high. It was a period of intensive creative activity and experiment conducive to the formulation of new ideas. Hence the creations of this period possess that fresh vigour, vitality in every glance and gesture, pulsating colour, and high-strung rhythm, which so often characterize the beginnings of a truly significant movement in art."²⁸

ପରମୀତ୍ତମାତ୍ରିମରାଜନୀତିପତ୍ର



PLATE 29

‘WHY THIS HESITATION, MY LOVE ?’

Illustration to the *Rasamañjari*

Basohli, circa 1690-95 A.D.

Size 12.3 in. x 8.1 in., Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu

Abhisārikā is a heroine who goes out to meet her beloved. This painting illustrates a Madhyā Abhisārikā heroine. Daring the hazards of rain, thunder and lightning the heroine has reached the pavilion of her beloved. The courage which inspired her during the dangerous journey is no more when she meets her lover. Holding her hand, he asks her the cause of her shyness and modesty.

The painting bears the following inscription :

भीतासिनैव भुजगात्पथि मदभुजस्य
संगे पुनः सुतनु कंपमुरी करोषि ॥
अंभोधरव्वनिभिरक्षुभितासि तन्वि ?
मदवाचि साचि वदनासि किमाचरामि ॥

Bhitāsinaiva bhujagātpathi madbhujasya
Saṅge punaḥ sutanu kampamūrī karoṣi
Ambhodharadhvanibhirakṣhubhitāsi tanvi ;
Madvāchi sāchi vadanaāsi kimācharāmi.

“Why this trembling, my slender Beauty. You, whom even the snakes could not frighten on the way, now tremble at the mere touch of my hand. The thundering clouds could not shake you, and yet you turn away at a mere word of love. What am I to do ?”

Rain is represented by pearl-like strands around the pavilion, and lightning by sinuous golden lines contrasting with the cobalt blue of the sky. Also note the grotesque animal heads projecting at the sides of the plinth of the pavilion. This is a feature also seen in the Coomaraswamy Collection of *Rasamañjari* paintings in the Boston Museum.

पवनामरक



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PLATE 30

WAITING FOR THE LOVER

Illustration to the *Rasamañjari*

Basohli, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 12.1 in. x 8.0 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

This painting illustrates Parakiyā Vāsakasajjā, the heroine who waits for her lover by the bed. On the reverse, the painting bears the following inscription from Bhanu Datta's *Rasamañjari*:

श्वश्रुं स्वापयतिच्छलेन च तिरोषते प्रदीपांकुरा-
न्धते सौष कपोत-पोत निनदैः सांकेतिकं चेष्टितम् ।
शश्वत्पादवर्विवर्तितांगलतिकं लोलत्पोलद्युति
क्वापि क्वापि करांबुजं प्रियधिया तल्पान्तिके न्यस्यति ॥
सुवावति सासुहि सांज्ञहि आनिपलंचल दीपक ज्योति निवारे ।
लोलकपोल दुहु छिंग डोलत बोलति ये घर बीर संभारे ॥
नाहाहि जानन कों हरये ही पिया पलिका परि पानि पसारे ।
कोक कपोतिनि की किलकारिनि आमुहि देत जनाइति नारे ॥

PARAKIYĀ VĀSAKASAJJĀ

Shvashrūm svāpayatichchhalena cha tirodhatte pradipāñkurān
Dhatte saudha kapota-pota ninadaih sāñketikam cheṣṭitam
Shashvatpārshva vivartitāṅga latikam lolatkapoladyuti
Kvāpi kvāpi karāmbujam priyadhiyā talpāntike nyasyati.
Suvāvati sāsuhi sāñjhahi āni palañchala dipaka jyoti nivāre
Lola kapola duhū ḥhiṅga ḥolata bolati ye dhari dhira sambhāre
Nāhahi jānana kou harayen hī piyā palikā pari pāni pasāre
Koka kapotini ki kilakārini āpuhi deta janāiti nāre.

"By sweet trickery she puts her mother-in-law to sleep, covers the flame of the lamp, and in the cooing of pet doves makes a sign to her lover to come. Like a waving creeper she rolls on the bed with her lovely cheeks shining. Now and then she stretches out her lotus arms as if to hold her lord, thinking that perhaps he is close."

The mother-in-law is shown asleep on the right. The heroine wearing ornaments and richly embroidered muslin clothes is lying on the bed. In the alcoves are goblets and flasks full of wine. In the topmost alcove are pairs of pet doves making love, and in the alcove to the right a lamp is burning covered by the fragment of the lower portion of a pitcher. Hanging from the pegs are four garlands. It is undoubtedly a work of extraordinary beauty and passionate abandon.

परकायवमनाम गु



PLATE 31

THE DILEMMA OF THE HEROINE

Illustration to the *Rasamañjari*

Basohli, circa 1695 A.D.

Size 12.6 in. x 8.0 in., Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu

This painting is an illustration of the following verse from *Rasamañjari* which is inscribed on the reverse.

स्वापे प्रियानन विलोकन हानिरेव
स्वापच्युती प्रियकर ग्रहण प्रसंगः ।
इत्थं सरोरुहमुखी परिचितयंतो
स्वापं विधातुमपि हातुमपि प्रपेदे ॥

Svāpe priyānana vilokana hānireva
Svāpachyutau priyakara grahaṇa prasaṅgah
Itthaṁ saroruhamukhi parichintayantī
Svāpaṁ vidhātumapi hātumapi prapede.

“The modest Nāyikā is in a dilemma. To fall asleep is to lose sight of the adored one; to remain awake is to risk physical possession. A stratagem suggests itself to her. She will just pretend to be asleep.”

The figure of the hero with his hawk-like nose and receding chin with a pointed fringed beard has resemblance with the male figures painted by the artist Devidasa for Raja Kirpal Pal of Basohli in his *Rasamañjari* series.



PARAKIYĀ VĀSAKASAJJĀ NĀYIKĀ

Basohli, circa 1760-70 A.D.

Size 12.9 in. x 8.5 in., Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu

This is another version of the theme of Parakiyā Vāsakasajjā Nāyikā, the heroine who lies in wait for her lover. He steals secretly to her bed when the other womenfolk of the household have fallen asleep. The Kangra features have already crept in; mark the rounded faces of the women and delicate line-work. Possibly it was painted at Basohli during the rule of Amrit Pal in the period 1760-70 A.D.

On the back of the painting is a Hindi verse in Devanagari script as below :

परकीया वासकसज्जा

देरनि जठनि सस ननद सभ राषी स्वइ
कहानि कहिके उठ छरनी सो ।
सारीका सुवानीहुके पींजरा उसर धरे
मिसु के निकासी दासि वाहीर धरनि सो ॥
दीयो अंचरा कीयो अंध्यारु दुरइ पुनि
पोड रहि अति चप क्यो के डरनी सो ।
अयो पीउ इहि अस पलिचा के आस पास
दबे निज सास टकरोटी रति करनि सो ॥

PARAKIYĀ VĀSAKASAJJĀ

Derani jaṭhani sasa nanada sabha rākhi svai
Kahāni kahike uṭha chharanī so
Sārikā suvānīhuke pīnjarā usara dhare
Misū ken nikāsī dāsi vāhīra gharanī so
Diyo ancharā kiyo andhyāru durai puni
Poḍa rahi ati chupa kyo ke ḍaranī so
Ayo piu ihin asa palighā ke āsa pāsa
Dabe niija sāsa ṭakarōṭī rati karani so.

"Telling stories, she lulls her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law to sleep, and steals away; next covers the cages of the birds and removes them to the shed, and sends out the maid-servant on some pretext. Then, putting out the lamp with a whiff of her sari, she hides herself in the dark and lies down on the bed quietly. Now her lover approaches with bated breath for the sweet rites of love."



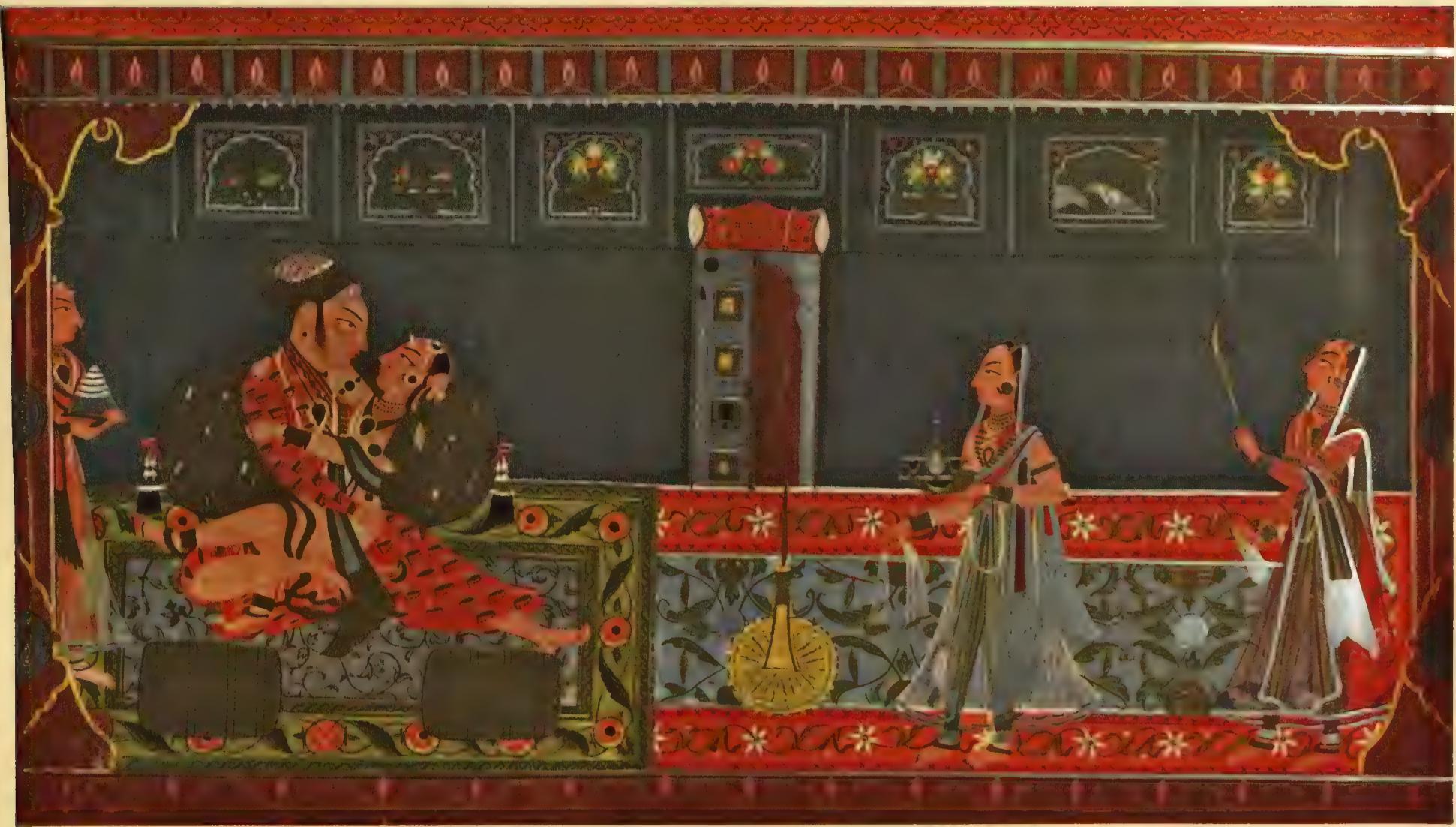
PLATE 33

LOVE IN UNION

Basohli, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 12.3 in. x 8.5 in., National Museum, New Delhi

The last phase of love is Sambhoga or love in union. There are numerous paintings both in Basohli and Kangra styles showing love scenes of the utmost intimacy. In this painting is shown a prince in dalliance with his beloved. In one of the alcoves is a pair of myna birds making love. A servant girl is holding a napkin and a tray with a flask of wine and a pair of goblets. Behind her another is holding a torch. The passionate theme of the painting admirably suits the Basohli style with its frankness, and bold and uncompromising use of red and blue colours.



SĀWAN IS THE MONTH OF LOVERS

Illustration to the *Bāramāsā*

Basohli, Early Eighteenth Century

Size 11.4 in. x 7.7 in., Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu

In the month of Sāwan, from mid-July to mid-August, the monsoon rains drench the earth. Coming after the parching heat of June and early July, they provide joy to the farmers, as well to the lovers. Life wakes and shines, the earth gets covered with a carpet of green grass, and the forest shows its glee in flowering *kadambas*, which are laden with yellow ball-like flowers. When the rain-clouds came, Radha longed to meet Krishna who was in the pavilion. In this painting the divine lovers are shown together admiring the play of lightning in the dark purple clouds, and the sight of golden mangoes on the tree. On hearing the clouds rumbling, the *papeeha* bird in the mango tree began shouting "Pi kahān! Pi kahān!" (where is my beloved, where is my beloved). The peacock on the cornice, longing for his mate, raised his head, and began shouting. Sāwan is the month of lovers, amorous, and passionate; lovers who are united feel happy, while those who are separated feel sad. This is a painting showing the lovers united, and happy enjoying the play of lightning in the clouds. Music is being played in the pavilion below. The painting shows all the elements of the month of Sāwan, the rain-clouds, the lightning, the ripe mangoes, music, love-birds, and the lovers united. We see the sinuous grace of the Kangra line in this late Basohli, though the pigments are still of the Basohli *kalam*.



NAT RĀGA

Basohli, circa 1700-20 A.D.

Size 8.4 in. x 8.1 in., Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras

There is a class of painting known as Rāgamālās or 'Garlands of Modes of Music', in which the mood and sentiment behind the traditional forms of Indian music are portrayed. Nārada, the author of *Sangeeta Makaranda*, written in eleventh century A.D., classified the Rāgas, or musical modes, into masculine and feminine according to the mood sought to be invoked. The masculine musical modes were called Rāgas, and the feminine Rāginis. The Rāgas were visualized as kings, and the Rāginis as their queens. There are six main Rāgas, each with six queens, thirty-six in all. In Rajasthani Rāgamālā paintings thirty-six Rāgas and Rāginis are usually painted. With the development of music further elaboration took place, and each main Rāga was provided with eight sons thus raising the number of Rāgas and Rāginis to eighty-four.

In this painting from Basohli, Rāga Nat, son of Rāga Megha, is visualized in the form of acrobats performing physical feats. One of them is climbing a pole, while another is taking exercise with a *mughdar*. A drummer is encouraging them by beating a drum lustily. The jade colour in the background provides a magnificent background to the fair acrobats. Rāgamālā was a favourite theme with the Basohli artists, and a number of Basohli Rāgamālā paintings have been recorded, including ten by Coomaraswamy in his Catalogue of Boston Museum. The style of this painting is more refined as compared with *Rasamañjari* paintings; and it can be ascribed to the period of Dhiraj Pal, who was a scholar, and a patron of art and learning.



PLATE 36

THE LOVE-LORN LADY

Basohli, *circa* 1690-93 A.D.

Size 7.94 in. x 6.1 in., Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras

This picture shows a love-lorn lady, a Virahini Nāyikā, standing under the shade of a willow tree, remembering her absent lover. The willow is usually the symbol of pangs of separation. Holding a hawk on her right hand, the elegant lady looks charming. With its air of love-longings, dignity, poise and charm, it is undoubtedly a masterpiece of Basohli school of painting. This picture was very likely painted during the rule of Raja Kirpal Pal. The lotus-eyes, ornaments, striped trousers, and transparent over-garment resemble those of Radha in Plate 37.



PLATE 37

RADHA GIVING BUTTER-MILK TO KRISHNA

Illustration to Bihari's *Sat Saiya*

Basohli, *circa* 1690 A.D.

Size 11.2 in. \times 8 in., Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras

This picture illustrates the following verse from Bihari's *Sat Saiya*:

अहे, दहेंडी जिनि धरे, जिनि तू लेहि उतारि ।
नीके है छोंके छुवै, ऐसैई रहि, नारि ॥

—बिहारी

Ahē dāherī jini dharē, jini tu lehi utāri
Nikē hai chhīnkē chhuve aisi rahi nāri

'O damsel, do not place the pot of curd in the
Chhīka, nor take it down. Remain standing as you are,
you look so lovely' !

Fermented butter-milk (*lassi*) is a most welcome drink in the heat of summer. It was a hot summer day and Krishna asked Radha for a drink of *lassi*. When she stretched her arms to reach the pot hanging from the roof of the pavilion, her wide-flung legs, projecting bust and lovely face fascinated him, and he asked her to remain standing in that posture.

The drapery of the girl, her striped trousers and ornaments resemble those of the female attendants of Raja Kirpal Pal in Plate 1. It is very likely that it was painted under his patronage by one of his court artists.



PLATE 38

'A DAMSEL I SAW SUPREMELY FAIR !'

Nurpur, 1770-80 A.D.

Size 5.6 in. x 4.1 in., Punjab Museum, Patiala

In this lovely painting Radha is dancing before Krishna and Balarama. Behind them is a cowherd boy leaning on a staff. They are gazing at Radha like chakora birds at the full moon. Peerless is Radha's beauty; her restless eyes are the play-ground of the waves of love, her curved eyebrows the bow of Kāma. Her arms are like creepers, her waist is narrow, and caressing the burden of her globe-like breasts is a pearl necklace. Framed by the dark blue sari, her fair face appears like the full moon in the lap of a dark cloud. It is thus that poet Vidyāpati describes Radha's beauty :

"Fair face, red brow-spot, there behind the heavy jet-black hair,
As if the sun and moon together rising left the night behind.
Ah damsel fair ! with what and what devoted care,
Has Nature given to you the utmost beauty of the moon ?"²⁸

This painting was acquired by the Punjab Museum from the collection of the Wazir family of Nurpur. Wazir Sham Singh raised a revolt against the British in 1848 A.D. In a battle fought at 'Dalla ki Dhar' in the Shivaliks, he was defeated. His house was set on fire by the British General but fortunately a half-burnt bundle of paintings was rescued, which is now with his great-grandson Ram Singh. This painting is in late Basohli style; the high horizon, and deep red and blue pigments are its Basohli features, while the figures are in Kangra style.



AFTERWORD

There was a suggestion that I might contribute a foreword to Dr. M. S. Randhawa's monograph on Basohli Painting. I do not like forewords, because they tend to become verbose and condescending. And in the case of so important a book, based on original research, it would have been impertinent to insert a supercilious recommendation. I have, therefore, chosen to add an Afterword, a kind of appendix, as it were, to supplement Dr. Randhawa's chapter on 'Characteristics of Basohli Paintings', the opinions expressed in which are shared by us. I hope my notes will help to bring the Basohli work within reach of the understanding of contemporary painters, whose approach to the problems of handling paint seems to be similar.

SOME NOTES ON THE 'PICTORIAL SITUATION' IN BASOHLI PAINTING

BY MULK RAJ ANAND

Ochre red, golden yellow, Krishna-blue, mauve, brown, moon-white and green of several hues. These are the colours used by the Basohli painters. The drawing of the figures is firm but primitive, dramatized by the intense fish eyes. The trees, foliage and landscape, are treated in rich patterns, as important as the personages of the human and divine world. The composition seems instinctive, but has been fairly well thought out as a design, so as to lend the pictures the cumulative effect of a distinctive style, recognizable as something quite different from the other *kalams*, a vivid, rich manner, warm, passionate, tense and startling.

There is no doubt that the Basohli pictures have a theme, be they portraits, illustrations of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Gīta Govinda*, *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Rasamañjari*. But I believe that, even when they tell a story, there is a pictorial situation in them. The painter is at work beyond the story teller.

In general, most of the paintings and sculptures in Indian art are occupied with a theme. It is unlikely, however, that the artisans were merely abject followers of the poets, epic writers or iconographers, though they often work by poetical analogy, that is to say, they try to communicate, in a poem of line and colour, the kind of meaning intended in the word poem. And the time has come when we should study the methods of the painters and the techniques with which each of them faces a particular pictorial situation, disposes of the space relations in terms of paint. For the kind of literary, sociological and historical analysis which depends upon knowledge, may be important in rediscovering the background of a tradition, but it does not often take us anywhere near the art. For all art is based, ultimately, on intense feeling, and the emotional flow directs the curves of the lines, as well as the handling of the paint. Specially is this so in the more imaginative styles of Indian Painting as against the naturalist periods of Indian and Western Art.

Let us take a concrete instance. There is frequent use in Basohli, even as in the Moghul and Rajasthani schools, of the trailing tendrils of willow trees. The treatment by the Basohli painters is bolder, differing from the way in which the Moghul painters treat the branches, and certainly very different from the way the European painter makes the laburnum tendrils trail.

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Is the mere poetical metaphor of how the tendrils trail a more important fact than the particular way in which the colour and line is used by a painter to express the image ?

Obviously, the universal poetical metaphor is almost a *cliche*. But the interpretation by a particular painter, in particular pigments, in relation to other particular elements in a picture, is always a new discovery. The serious artist engages in a quest. He struggles to achieve such a pattern, or pictorial situation, as may realize beauty in concrete relations rather than sit vacantly inquiring into the universal concept of beauty like a philosopher.

2

Now, let us see how the artist, or craftsman as he really was, worked.

He was generally, until the end of the 19th century, a member of a hereditary family in a village or a local town. Some families of craftsmen, in the village or town, were generally more distinguished than others. And when the local prince wished to have silver utensils made or pictures painted, he would call the most skilled craftsman of a family from near or far. The hereditary families of craftsmen remained in their locality, until some social change, like famine or war, forced them to move. It was thus, for instance, that, in the troubled times under Aurangzeb, the artists moved from the imperial centres of Agra and Delhi to the various provinces.

The fact that the hereditary artisans lived in a particular locality, and the fact that, apart from being occasionally chosen to work for the princes, they were part of the village community, earning their living, mostly in kind, for services rendered, rooted them in the spiritual and social background of the community. They partook of the mnemonic tradition of the *Shāstras*, through remembering verses dealing with measurements, iconography and other matters affecting their craft, as well as in the myths and legends of their faiths. During the long apprenticeship to the father, or uncle, or *guru*, they learnt to perfect their techniques and prepared for the professional life, upheld and controlled by the strength of the tradition of indigenous art, and thus they did not easily fall prey to alien impacts. There were few or no amateur artists in Indian society. And the fundamental attitude, as well as the skill of artisans, was dedicated to the aspiration of the craft brotherhood to create at the highest pressure. Often the best work achieved by the family was on view in the local temple, fort or palace. And the younger members of the craft, both consciously and unconsciously, were affected by the high standards achieved by their predecessors. And in each family there were stored the implements, preparatory drawings and the formulas for mixing colours, often consecrated through a ceremony of the worship of implements, performed once a year.

The growth of the artisan in such an atmosphere allied him to all the impulses of the folk imagination. The continuity of Indian civilization, almost without any change except the passing of kings and the decay of empires at the top, left all kinds of survivals in the villages. Apart from the epic and bardic narratives about the gods and heroes, the moralistic fables, stories, and *bon mots* inured the folk to broodings about all the energies and forces around them which had become incarnate in tree spirits, snake spirits, fauns, dryads, *jinns*, *bhuts*, and fairies. The primitive beliefs in magical secret rites and recitation of *mantras* for appeasement, mixed with high doctrines of birth and rebirth, through vegetable and animal existences, to human status according to the rewards accruing on deeds. The intense,

highly charged feelings of the folk sought expression in multifarious forms of clay and brass images, ritualistic drawings and paintings.

It is likely that the Rajas of Basohli had, in their employ, such artisans from among the hillmen in their region even before the princes made their acquaintance with the painters of the Moghul court whom they obviously met when they went to pay homage to the emperor at Delhi.

A cursory glance at the Basohli paintings assures us of the folk basis of this style long before the Moghul influence made itself felt. For, in the folk base, there was a genuine poetic feeling, if one may use the word 'poetic' not in its literary sense but to define the interior attitude of these artisans as against the analytical approach of the naturalist painter.

3

What, then, are the main elements in the pictorial situation facing the Basohli artists ?

I suggest that from the folk base came the use of single flat planes, rhythmical contours, the passionate colours, the fish eyes, and the distortion of bodies to produce what Archer has called 'the savage intensity'.

The emotional red colour, the black, in fact all the primary colours, derive from the local mixtures. The seeming crudeness itself is from folk origin, because in all primitive art the forcefulness of expression is not a defect but a virtue. The boldness of execution, the audacity, seems to be unafraid of sophisticated criticism and is, therefore, simple, often naive, but never hesitant or nervous. The depth which comes from thickness of paint and is used for religious suggestion was also part of the local sense. The stylized round trees occur in a good deal of primitive art in Asia. The stylization may have come from Arabia, or *via* the tree of life, abounding with birds, from Persia, but was almost conventional a long time ago. The treatment of figures derives from the accepted idea of the rounded ovoid form, inspired from within, that is to say, expressive of inner vitality, like the fruit bursting with the sap. This convention was integral to Indian art, which is throughout imaginative and rhythmic and draws and carves in the concave rather than strain after naturalistic proportions, surface effects through modelling and relation of units. The wood carvings of the Brahmapura Kingdom, later Chamba, of Mandi-Suket, and Lahul, approximate to the imaginative grasp of plastic form which matured in the Kashmir complex of the Northern Indian hills and has remained the pattern for human figures in our folk art till today. Again, the rounding of the figures, with a musical line, or what Shahid Suhrawardy has called the 'accelerated line', may have affinities with the Chinese and Persian line, but it had become the synthetic Indian line since Ajanta and survived in the fresco tradition of Tibet and Central Asia until Jan Hwang and of our own countryside.

The Moghul influence, which was decisive in maturing the 17th and 18th century art of the hills, contributed, through its own assimilation of Arab, Turkish and Persian styles, the Abbasid primitivism, the Persian decorativeness and quick elastic line, and the Central Asian-Chinese use of gold and sense of space. These elements may have been absorbed by the Moghul painters so as to become indistinguishable. But a technician takes from outer sources what he wants almost instinctively. And, evidently, the hill painters of

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Basohli saw a good many pictures from Agra and Delhi or worked in the same verandah with the Moghul artists engaged by the princes.

Apart from the similarity which the cultured folk art of Basohli shared with previous primitive styles like those of the Caliphate, with Sassanian infiltrations and with Central Asian remnants, directly or indirectly, the influence of the Persian-Moghul sense of pictorial design is the most important feature of these paintings. The Persian-Moghul masters constructed their pictures on what Binyon has called 'the principle of decorative isolation'. These painters wished to realize human joy in flowers and blossoming trees. And to do this they abstracted the intricacy of natural flowers and trees by choosing a few plants and blossoms and treating them, symbolically, for decoration and pleasure. They put all the lovely things they admired, such as clouds, birds, animals and lovers, into the available space and sought to communicate a vivid sense of joy in the object of vision. The Moghul painter, unlike his Persian antecedent, often became naturalistic, but accepted, in the main, the Persian pictorial design. This Moghul pictorial design affected the Kangra *kalam*, to a large extent, while in Basohli this principle of particularity in design, or decorativeness, still conflicts with the 'principle of suggestion' deriving from the folk tradition, through which trees, and flowers and mountains are left out of the picture or are jutting out to indicate the spaces beyond, stimulating the imagination to run away on its own by accepting the forms displayed as only symbols of the outer universe.

The second important feature of the Persian-Moghul style was the technique of emphasizing different planes with the use of lustrous colours. This device itself, based on the folk concept of painting in the flat or in two dimensions, was accepted completely by the hill painters as a rationalization of their own traditional ground work in two dimensions.

The synthesis leaves much more on the credit side of folk art than some critics will admit. But, as everyone knows, the folk painting on palm leaf subsisted, and the wall painting tradition of India continued, in the humblest homes, after the break-up of the major fresco styles, and later became the reduced frescoes on paper, absorbing the vital values of the Persian-Moghul picture, which, as a miniature, belongs originally to a different tradition from the tradition from which the reduced frescoes derived.

4

Let us study this synthesis in terms of some pictures in order to understand the exact way in which the folk and the Persian-Moghul influences cohered into the Basohli pattern.

Plate I, Portrait of Raja Kirpal Pal, is a very good example of the direct influence of the Persian-Moghul miniature design on the Basohli style.

First of all, there were seldom any portraits in Indian Painting until the school of Akbar, except in the Mandu *Niamat Namah*, where Ghiyas-ud-Din Khalji appears, in pictures reproduced by Archer in his book, *Central Indian Painting* (Pls. I & II) and other *Niamat Namah* pictures described by Robert Skelton in *Mārg* (Vol. 12, No. 3). Impressions of real people were certainly woven into the texture of the design frequently, from Ajanta downwards; but the absence of portraiture in the long tradition of Indian Art affirms the belief of the Hindus in anonymity.

On the other hand, the Basohli portrait before us is a local interpretation of the likeness of profile invented in the Moghul Court. From the time of Akbar's coming on the throne,

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till the end of the Moghul Empire, there is a long gallery of personal portraits, mostly in profile, of the emperors and their courtiers.

This portrait may be considered then, in the Moghul tradition, except for certain motifs and the general handling which are typical of Basohli. And here we are face to face with the evolution of the new style of Basohli, at the same time as we know that the Moghul influence has been exercised on the general framework and not on the particular local elements.

The cohesion of the design within the picture frame, and even some of the structural forms in the relation of figures, have come from the Moghul workshop, but the ethnical types represented clearly belong to the hills. Raja Kirpal Pal, though clad in the *jama* and turban current in Northern India at that time, retains his Rajput features and colouring, and so do the chamber-maids, who are hill women. Even the *hugga* is a rustic specimen of the Basohli area rather than the elegant bubble-bubble with the long, winding tube of the Moghul Court. But, more than the figures, the technique of laying colours is the intimate and homely folk manner rather than the fine manner of the Imperial Court. The thicker yellow background, and the simple patterns on the mauve and green on the floor carpet, sets the bolder tone in which the finer brushwork of the central figure and the attendants, as well as the flowery small carpet is realized.

The drawing, though modelled on the Moghul profile, draws upon the simple synthetic line of the Hindu technique which is seen more clearly in the Jaipur cartoons of Krishna of the 18th century than in the Moghul miniatures. The larger contours of the face and body are also reminiscent of the indigenous technique.

The Basohli structural elements may be said here to have been subjected to the outer frame, or design, deriving from the Moghul Court. If that is so, the life force of the picture comes from the folk inspiration.

5

The contrast between the Moghul-Persian 'principle of decorative isolation', and the Basohli 'principle of suggestion' may be more clearly demonstrated in Plate 13.

It will be noticed that the painter cuts the trees on the left in halves and the cow on the right. This was clearly necessary because the spaces left out of the painting were as important as the foreground filled with figures, trees and cows. The dominant consideration before the artisan here, beyond the rectangular form of the picture which came in with the Moghuls, is *depth and distance*, creating a kind of inner compulsion to see things in rhythmical relations throughout the universe, so that however cramping may have been the convention to fill the rectangular frame there was no boundary line to the undulations of the forms in the infinite world.

The symbols of the connection of what is included in the picture with outer space, the half trees and half cow, are there, as though in a larger picture, if the artist had been painting on a wall, they might have been included. The spectator is invited to see, from the artist's point of view, the relations of the figures and the foreground, and we are asked also to go across the country whence the river Jamuna arises and the further lands where she flows down.

There is no concern here for symmetry or balance in the naturalist sense. *The empty*

space was a positive factor before the artist, part of much bigger spaces. So he fills it in, not by studying the proportions of the objects but by a broad emphasis on the main actor in the drama, held in integral relation to the other figures, thus releasing the imagination of the spectator to flow out beyond the picture. There is no attempt to display all the forms in their completeness within the picture-frame.

This symmetrical design, based on space as a part of the space-time continuum, is also obvious in such a picture as Plate 23, 'How Krishna Wantoned in the Woods'. There, the power of forms, of Krishna and the Gopis in embrace, is emphasized against the more or less empty space in which Radha sits on a hillock with a sakhī in front, while a tree divides the groups in the middle. The relations of the figures here are expressed through the energies of the groups; even the static central tree becomes a dynamic factor, and there is no straining after anything beyond the subjective picture-language and the emotional colours. The scene of the misunderstanding between Radha and Krishna obviously invited a sombre background against which the bright colours of the figures would supply a contrast. The mixture of the palette is certainly masterly, if colours are to be used to arouse emotions rather than to remain merely decorative.

The use of empty spaces throughout Basohli must be stressed. The principle established in this primitive art was that to one of the main figures would be added other figures, as many as the design would allow, while the others would be left out because there is an endless multiplicity of forms in the unity of Life. The crowd effect would be suggested by repetition of similar forms. The organic balance would be achieved by the *ad hoc* inner relations of figures, and colours, following instinct and inspiration, rather than by obeying the laws of composition around a central figure. Thus we get here a real sense of crowds, animated by passions, rather than cold forms providing merely pleasing sensations to the eyes. (See Plate 22, 'Sports of Krishna in the Spring Time').

6

Now let us see the Basohli treatment of pure landscape. In Plate 21, 'The South Wind Cools itself in the Snow of the Himalayas', landscape remains integral to the indigenous Hindu concept of infinity and is more akin to the manner of the Chinese and the Japanese than to the Persian-Moghuls. The whole thing is imaginary, unrelated to any actual mountains, or trees, or to their natural colours. The fancy creates hills and rocks from the racial subconscious, peopling it with frightening snake forms, reptiles ascending the trees, while snow rests on the crags. All the trees known to the artist are crowded in to give the effect of dense foliage.

The structural truth about the use of limited space to suggest outer spaces is again obvious here. One knows that there are many more mountains and forests beyond those in view, undulations of the infinite universe, and the effect of distance is achieved by repetition of mountain patterns. And the forest life is instinct with life and movement. Not only can we see the hills and touch the snow, but we can almost hear the sinister sound of the snakes and sense the dangers of going up there. The mood of the mountains is like that of the fearsome unknown world, with its vivid depths, living by the music of its own rhythms. This kind of treatment has nothing to do with mere decorativeness of the Persian, or with landscape as the background for man as in Western naturalistic art.

The 'principle of suggestion' is further confirmed by the treatment of demoniac forms, particularly in Plate 4, 'The Birth of Evil', and generally elsewhere. Some of the *jinns*, *bhuts*, and *rākṣasas* as of Indian folk mythology are conjured up, with their fantastic animal faces, protruding teeth and paws like bird claws. Like the good spirits of divine personages, the evil spirits also are part of our universe. And it is no use turning away from their ugly faces and forms to look at lovely girls painted with sugary sentimentality, because even the seemingly pretty faced girl may be a *rākṣasī* at heart, possessed of *tāmasik* emotions of hatred, jealousy and anger. And so may the outwardly handsome hero be possessed of evil moods. In the racial unconscious of the Hindus, the mental and moral struggle was linked up with the inner relations of the forces of good and evil. Primitive folk could see the demons everywhere.

The painter, therefore, crowds these evil forms among flowing clouds of various sombre colours, almost as though they were going to descend upon the world from the heavy monsoon skies. The brush-work is as moving as in the Chinese landscape. So the clouds suggest a wandering of the soul among the demons. At each turn the mysterious forebodings of the human heart are unfolded. And the whole picture is replete with those shy fears, and brooding inhibitions about which people speak in the dark. The mental anguish of man is expressed here, poised as he is between heaven and hell. And it is expressed by the laying of colours in a series of repetitive patterns, by which fantasy is controlled, only to be released in an aesthetic catharsis.

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**RAJAS OF HILL STATES OF BASOHLI, JAMMU, JAMMU AND KASHMIR, NURPUR,
KULU AND CHAMBA**

BASOHLI		JAMMU		JAMMU & KASHMIR	
Bhupat Pal	1598-1635	Sangram Dev	1600-1625	Gulab Singh	1846-1857
Sangram Pal	1635-1673	Bhupat Dev	1625-1650	Ranbir Singh	1857-1885
Hindal Pal	1673-1678	Hari Dev	1650-1675		
*Kirpal Pal	1678-1693	Gajai Dev	1675-1703		
*Dhiraj Pal	1693-1725	*Dhruv Dev	1708-1735		
*Medini Pal	1725-1736	*Ghansar Dev	1735-1747		
Jit Pal	1736-1757	Ranjit Dev	1747-1781		
Amrit Pal	1757-1776	Brajraj Dev	1781-1787		
Vijay Pal	1776-1806	Sampuran Dev	1787-1797		
Mahendra Pal	1806-1813	Jit Dev	1797-1812		
Bhupendra Pal	1813-1834				
Kalyan Pal	1845-1857				

NURPUR		KULU		CHAMBA	
Jagat Singh	1619-1646	Jagat Singh	1637-1672	Chhatar Singh	1664-1690
Rajrup Singh	1646-1661	Bidhi Singh	1672-1688	*Udai Singh	1690-1720
*Mandhata	1661-1700	*Man Singh	1688-1719	*Ugar Singh	1720-1735
*Dayadhata	1700-1735	*Rai Singh	1919-1731	*Dalel Singh	1735-1745
*Prithvi Singh	1735-1789	*Jai Singh	1731-1742	Umed Singh	1745-1764
Bir Singh	1789-1846	*Tedi Singh	1742-1767	Raj Singh	1764-1794
		Pritam Singh	1767-1806	Jit Singh	1794-1808
		Bikram Singh	1806-1816		
		Ajit Singh	1816-1841		

Note: The dates of rulers of Hill States are according to Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Punjab Hill States*. Names of Rajas who were patrons of painting in Basohli style are marked with an asterisk.

GLOSSARY

<i>Bandhujiva</i> :	A flowering plant with red flowers
<i>Borāss</i> :	<i>Rhododendron arboreum</i> , a Himalayan tree with red flowers
<i>Chaukā</i> :	Kitchen
<i>Chakora</i> :	<i>Perdix rufa</i> , a partridge, said to be the lover of the moon
<i>Chauri</i> :	A fly-whisk with hair from the yak's tail
<i>Garuḍa</i> :	A mythical bird with a parrot head and partly human body : the vehicle of Vishnu and enemy of serpents
<i>Ghāṭ</i> :	A bathing place on a river or a tank or a pond
<i>Gopas</i> :	Cowherd boys, playmates of Krishna
<i>Gopīs</i> :	Cowherd damsels with whom Krishna sported in Vrindavan
<i>Gossains</i> :	Hermits
<i>Har Singār</i> :	<i>Nyctanthes arbor-tristis</i> , the Pārijāta tree which sheds flowers early in the morning
<i>Huggā</i> :	Smoking pipe with smoke filtering through water
<i>Kadamba</i> :	<i>Anthocephalus indicus</i> —a beautiful flowering tree with ball-like flowers associated with Krishna
<i>Keorā</i> :	<i>Pandanus odoratissimus</i> , screw-pine, also known as <i>ketaki</i> . Highly fragrant in florescence, flowers in rains
<i>Koel</i> :	<i>Eudynamys honorata</i> , Indian Cuckoo, its cry is 'Tu ho ! Tu ho !'. Is a lover of mango blossoms.
<i>Mughdar</i> :	A heavy pair of clubs used for exercise
<i>Natni</i> :	Female acrobat
<i>Nāyaka</i> :	Hero or lover
<i>Nāyikā</i> :	Heroine or beloved
<i>Papeehā</i> :	<i>Hierocyx varius</i> , the hawk-cuckoo, a love-bird—its cry is 'Pi Kahān', which means "Where is the beloved ?"
<i>Pashmina</i> :	A fine type of wool of Himalayan goats
<i>Putreṣṭi yajña</i> :	A sacrifice performed by the issueless
<i>Sandal</i> :	<i>Santalum album</i> , a tree with fragrant heart-wood; grows in Mysore State
<i>Vamshāvali</i> :	Geneological table

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